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CANADA'S LEADING RACING CLUB,
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Frontispiece.

THE
CREAM OF LEICESTERSHIRE
ELEVEN SEASONS' SKIMMINGS

NOTABLE RUNS AND INCIDENTS OF THE CHASE

(SELECTED AND REPUBLISHED FROM "THE FIELD")

BY

CAPTAIN PENNELL-ELMHIRST
("BROOKSBY")

AUTHOR OF "THE HUNTING COUNTRIES OF GREAT BRITAIN," AND JOINT-AUTHOR OF
"OUR LIFE IN JAPAN."



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS, COLOURED AND PLAIN,

BY
JOHN STENGESS
AND PORTER'S FIELD MAP



LONDON

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1883

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BRADBURY, AGNEW, & CO., PRINTERS, WHITEFRIARS.

TO
HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS
THE PRINCE OF WALES,

WHO HAS TAKEN PART IN SOME OF THE SCENES HEREIN DEPICTED, AND
WHOSE ACTIVE INTEREST IN THE TRUEST OF ENGLISH SPORTS
HAS DONE MUCH TO MAINTAIN FOXHUNTING IN ITS HONOURED POSITION,

THIS PUBLICATION
IS
BY SPECIAL PERMISSION, AND WITH VERY GRATEFUL THANKS,

Dedicated

BY
THE AUTHOR.

June, 1883.



P R E F A C E.

It is not for a moment intended that the experiences of a single individual, as here given, should be put forward as comprehending all—or nearly all—worth notice in the seasons referred to. The utmost to which these pages aspire is, that they may be deemed fairly representative of the years in question, and as illustrating the sport and pleasure attainable in a grass country, by any one who will work hard and regularly, and who loves to ride to hounds—where hounds and men are at their best.

Of all who may honour me by reading this volume, I would crave that it should be looked upon merely as a Scrap Book, to be taken up for a few minutes only, when thought may happen to turn upon Fox-hunting. Its pages and its views will, I trust, find sympathy in *some* breasts, and with this hope it is sent abroad. It is but a reprint after all, which has been purposely left as originally written—thus perhaps to mark the lapse of years, and a possible change of thought and sentiment (whether for better or worse) between youth's first impressions and maturity's battered experience. This at any rate I can still maintain—and am happy to think there are many, many with me—that the delights of a good run in good company defy over-estimate. The pen that can do full justice to a well-enjoyed and fairly-ridden run has yet to be made, though even a common-place quill should now and again drive with some life and *go* on such a topic.

In the twenty past years of a varied existence at home and abroad, it has been my fortune to see sport of most kinds, but only to arrive with fervent sincerity at the conclusion framed by the honoured dead, whose portrait will be found in this volume—

“I’ve played the game all round,
But I’m free to confess that the best of my fun
I owe it to horse and hound.”

True and hearty thanks do I offer to my fellow sportsmen in Leicestershire, who during all these years have never cavilled at aught I wrote, have never resented such use as, in my capacity as correspondent of the *Field*, I was oftentimes obliged to make of their names; but who have invariably given tacit encouragement, and if needed, ready help, to one of their number whose first aim they knew was to see sport, his next to reproduce it as truly as he could.

I must further be allowed to express my gratitude to my old and consistent friends the Proprietors and the Editor of the *Field*, for allowing me to republish material that was originally furnished for them, while, on my good fortune in securing the able and spirited co-operation of Mr. Sturgess, I have every reason to congratulate my readers as much as myself.

Leicestershire will, I see no reason to doubt, last at least *our* time; and may, perhaps, prove as fruitful of enjoyment to a next generation. But railway competition and bricks-and-mortar will, likely enough, bring its green existence to a too early end, and then these jottings and these sketches will help to keep alive the memory of a happy *temporis acti*.

CONTENTS.

SEASON 1870—71.

	PAGE
THE HORSE FOR LEICESTERSHIRE	1
BIG HORSES VERSUS LITTLE ONES	5
A SWIM OVER THE WREAKE	9
FINE RUN WITH THE PYTCHELEY FROM NORTH KILWORTH	12
A SPURT FROM SCRAPTOFT	14
THE PRINCE OF WALES AT MELTON	18
LAST QUORN MONDAY OF 1871	29

SEASON 1871—72.

A CLINKER WITH MR. TAILBY FROM OWSTON WOOD	34
COLONEL EDWARD CHAPLIN'S RUN IN A FOG	39
A BURST IN THE SUNSHINE FROM SCRAPTOFT GORSE	45
THE OLD EARL TAKES THE LEAD FROM HIS OWN COVERT	48
AFTER THE HARBOROUGH BALL	48
A ROUGH AND TUMBLE FROM THRUSSINGTON NEW COVERT	54
A WET AFTERNOON SCRAMBLE	57
WET LEICESTERSHIRE	58
A JUVENILE MATCH	62
MR. TAILBY'S FINAL SUCCESS IN HIS OWN COUNTRY	63

CONTENTS.

SEASON 1872—73.

	PAGE
TWO GOOD DAYS WITH THE AETHERSTONE	69
THE LAST RUN OF 1872 WITH THE COTTESMORE	74
A BELVOIR BURST	77
A QUORN FOREST INCIDENT	79
A RED LETTER WEEK	80
MARKET HARBOROUGH	87
A WOLD DAY WITH THE QUORN	91
THE ASFORDBY RASPERS	93
FROM WOODLANDS OVER THE GRASS WITH THE COTTESMORE	97
A GOOD FINISH TO THE WEEK	100

SEASON 1873—74.

KIRBY GATE	103
A SCURRY OVER THE MELTON STEEPLE-CHASE COURSE	108
GAY NOVEMBER	111
THE QUORN IN LUCK	115
CHRISTMASTIDE, 1873	125
QUICK IN AND OUT OF A FROSTY LANE	131
A LEICESTERSHIRE BURST (THE DOCTOR LEADS)	133
THE QUORN HUNT TAKES THE WATER	137
LORD ROSSMORE	140

SEASON 1874—75.

A FROST BROKEN WINTER	142
THE WEEK OF THE SEASON	144
A BYE-DAY STOLEN	151

CONTENTS.

xi

	PAGE
A PROTEST AGAINST BUTCHERY	155
A RING FROM THORPE TRUSSELS	159
ALL FOOLS' DAY, 1875	162

SEASON 1876—77.

FIRST FRUITS OF 1876	166
A NORTHERN VETERAN	172
FROM STAPLEFORD	173
THE TWO GREAT RUNS OF THE SEASON WITH THE COTTESMORE:	
FROM ORTON PARK WOOD	180
(A BELVOIR FOX AND A QUORN PIG)	
THE RANKSBORO' RUN	188

SEASON 1877—78.

A PREFACE TO THE SEASON	197
KIRBY GATE 1877	200
A SCENT ON THE PLOUGH	205
THE WHISSENDINE	209
PERILS BY LAND AND WATER	215
THE PINK WEDDING	218
A NORTH WARWICKSHIRE CORNER	220
A RELEASE	223
SUNNY FEBRUARY	227
WITHOUT HOUNDS AND WITH	232
THRUST AND THIRST	236
TO GROUND IN VIEW	240
END OF THE SEASON	242

SEASON 1878—79.

	PAGE
BOOT AND SADDLE	248
CUB HUNTING	255
AT HOME IN A STORM	258
THE BELVOIR AT HOME AND ABROAD	260
GEORGE WHYTE MELVILLE	264
FOX-HUNTING IN THE SNOW	269
WATERLOO GORSE AND THRUSINGTTON GORSE	273
THE PUNCHBOWL RUN	276
THE MASONS OF MELTON	283
A BAGGRAVE FINALE	292

SEASON 1879—80.

FIRST CHAPTER OF ACCIDENTS	297
SNATCHED FROM THE FROST	302
A PULL FROM THE PUNCHBOWL	304
SCRAPTOFT AND BARKBY	310
ASH WEDNESDAY WITH THE BELVOIR	314
RAIN AND SPORT	319
MARCH SUN AND SCENT	322

SEASON 1880—81.

OCTOBER BREWING	328
A LATE BEGINNING	331
A RUN UNSEEN	333

CONTENTS.

xiii

	PAGE
MASTER AS HUNTSMAN	337
NEW YEAR'S DAY, 1881	341
A SAMPLE OF THE SEASON	345
GRIM DEATH	347
DANCE AND DISASTER	351
SHARP MOMENTS	355
SNOW SKIRMISHING	358
A LINK WITH THE PAST	363
A STRANGER IN THE LAND	367

SEASON 1881—82.

HARVEST-TIME	371
AUTUMN CONDITION	375
GRASS AND WATER	379
ST. MARTIN'S SUMMER	385
THE TILTON DAY OF 1881	394
TRIFLES	398
BOXING DAY, 1881	403
HARD AND FAST	408
A ROUGH LINE	414
THE RIDERLESS RUN	416
HUNT WE MUST	422
LIFE AND DEATH	425
CONCLUSION	432

LIST OF FULL PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS.

THE HORSE FOR LEICESTERSHIRE *Frontispiece*

The Master knees the rail and comes down a cracker ; Lord Grey de Wilton rolls over close after him. Crash ! bang ! comes Macbride. The Prince's horse feels the pace, sticks his head out and refuses obstinately *To face page 24*

Five loose horses are careering about at once ; five pairs of Bartley's are stumbling over the fallow ; and five pairs of lungs are gasping a wild entreaty to "Stop him !" *To face page 75*

The Bridge bent beneath them ; and for a moment or two they were all struggling together, the water dashing over their prostrate forms.

To face page 139

THE NEW RAILWAY ONCE MORE " " 193

"HONOUR TO WHOM HONOUR IS DUE" " " 231

A regular panic ensued ; horses plunged and shied ; and the signal wires caught some of them as in a trap *To face page 288*

"WHERE DID YOU GO, MAJOR, INSTEAD OF COMING OVER THE BROOK?"
To face page 384

PORTRAIT OF THE LATE G. WHYTE-MELVILLE *To face page 264*

MAP, "THE CREAM OF LEICESTERSHIRE" " " 1

INTRODUCTION.

IN a certain venerable volume,* that may not be familiar to readers generally, it is written for the world's information—"Leicestershire (which is explained to be otherwise Ledcestershire, a town or castle on the Leir, ancient name for Soar), being almost in the middle of England, and consequently at a considerable distance from the sea, the air is very sweet and wholesome." The same publication has it, that "the pastures all about Melton Mowbray are exceeding good, and the appearance pleasing.

"With respect to the inhabitants of this county, they are in their manners consistent with their situations in life—many of them being as polished in their manners and conversation as any in England." This is satisfactory for such as dwell in Leicestershire; and they could hardly have penned the eulogium better themselves. I don't quite like it, though, that only *many* of us carry a polish—though a broad margin is left to allow for the variety of our "situations in life."

Now, we rather pride ourselves upon a certain amount of general polish in Leicestershire—at all events when we carry ourselves, and our manners, into the hunting-field. We are very particular about taking our turn—or, at the very least, we always aver with much apology that we "couldn't hold our horse," when by accident a vantage

* Dalton's British Traveller.

has been stolen. We don't call each other rough names ; though we are charmed to let any M.F.H. open upon us, if it will serve the good cause. We don't jump on each other's backs, in spite of frequent opportunity ; and very few of us let a gate slam behind us purposely. We greet each other each morning with more or less absolute pleasure ; and we bid Good-night under the idea that we have spent some hours in the company of good fellows, and that there hangs no ill memory on that day's experience. For the hunting-field tempts but little discord. There is an unanimity of purpose and a common enthusiasm ; while the stake to be won is not out of the pockets of our fellows. There may be a little jealousy ; but it is best kept under. It meets with no sympathy if expressed, but rebounds doubly on the individual who dares to give it vent. A cheery *camaraderie* is our tenet. Sometimes, perhaps, the individual may carry it only surface-deep ; but it is *something* that he should consider it a principle ; and that it *is* a recognised principle can work no harm.

It may often happen that a man goes to covert sore and miserable on subjects that are wrapped within his own breast. At home he would, likely enough, make others feel his villainous state of mind. Outside he must adopt another *rôle*. The discipline is wholesome ; and, if it does not work an instant cure, allows the more exuberant symptoms of his malady no chance. Ill-temper, like hysterics, develops most under sympathy. The cold water of inattention effects the speediest cure.



THE
CREAM OF LEICESTERSHIRE.

SEASON 1870-71.

THE HORSE FOR LEICESTERSHIRE.

JANUARY 12TH, 1871.



T occurs to us in the midst of a bitterly prolonged frost, and by no means pleasantly, that when it pleases the clerk of the weather to give us our ticket of leave, we shall find that he lets loose at the same time the multitude that always rush to venery in the spring. Usually they appear gradually on the scene, the throng swelling day by day; but this year we shall find ourselves at a jump struggling in the inundation, and the select and cheery ante-

Christmas fields luxuries of the past. The worst of this will be that each and every individual will be mounted on a steed fresh and wild enough to carry a Mazeppa,

and the kicking in a gateway will be as fierce as in one of the dear old football scrummages at Rugby, against which tender parents are now crying out so vehemently. In mortal terror, men will be snatching up their knees as they see ears go back and tail tucked in, and the thought of the bridle gate out of Barkby Holt, with the hounds away is too awful to contemplate. Horse-dealers, farmers, and—we are sorry to add—ladies, must especially be avoided; for who ever saw a vicious kicker that was not ridden by one of these three? The two former, by the way, are having a bad time of it, with no chance of showing or selling their animals, and no one will feel so much inclination to buy for an indefinite future as to run after them now. Not that there is ever any difficulty in selling a real “horse for Leicestershire;” he will always command his price, and there are plenty of men eager to give it. But the difficulty lies in finding him; for, like the diamonds in South Africa, he is only to be met with after much toil and disappointment, and many a glittering gem turns out to be worthless; and no wonder, when we consider all the requisites that go to make up such a horse. It is not sufficient that he should be able to gallop and jump, or even that he should be classed as A 1 in a different country. A perfect Leicestershire horse is a variety of his own, distinct and separate from the rest of his species, and perhaps comparitively useless elsewhere. Of course, everyone knows that blood, shape, and courage are the three chief requisites in a hunter; but by no means everyone appreciates to what extent these three are all necessary in the class of horse under mention. Blood he must have, and the more the better, so long as it is not at the expense of bone; for the old saying of “an ounce of blood being worth a pound of bone” holds good up to a certain point, and no further. Thus the commonest mistake men fall into when they first mount themselves for a flying country is to think that, so long as passable symmetry and clever fencing are not altogether lost sight of, blood and breeding will do everything else for them. But, as Whyte Melville amply

shows in the case of Mr. Sawyer and his little grey, you must have *size*. A small thoroughbred will go and jump a big place, and his blood and courage will help him more than anything. But it is the *succession* of big places that kills him, for at each of them he has to exert twice the effort that would be required from a larger horse. In the galloping, even, he has not so much advantage, for he is drowned in the ridge-and-furrow that the greater stride makes light of. He will win a steeplechase no doubt, giving-weight to his coarser brother ; but then steeple-chases are seldom run over the same style of country, and moreover, there is all the tiring, dragging work of a day's hunting to be considered. No better proof of the correctness of this view can be given than the instances of Mr. Tailby, and Mr. Mills, who, though light men, have for years trusted solely to big, powerful cattle. Another point we might have mentioned is that, while a light horse is pulled and shaken about by the thick bullfinches, a heavy one makes his way through with but little difficulty to himself and much greater safety to his rider, though, as the face of Leicestershire has undergone a great change of late years, and vast numbers of the venerable tangled old bullfinches have been transformed into smart stake-and-bounds, actual weight is not of such vital consequence as it used to be.

As regards shape, it is said on the flat that, "they can go in all forms ;" but though symmetrical evenness is by no means a *sine qua non* in the hunting field, there are certain all-important points which are the foundation stones of the whole structure, and upon which a man should insist before casting a second glance over a proffered purchase. First and absolutely, the shoulders must be unexceptionable. Sloping, clean, and well-defined, they should sweep right back, catching the eye at once with their sharp outline. A loaded shoulder means a crumpler over timber, while a straight one points its forefinger at the back sinews. The two essentials to enable a horse to withstand the shock of landing over wide places are sloping shoulders and sloping pasterns, and without these he will be

qualified for a carrier's cart at the end of one season, for either feet or legs are certain to give way. His legs, of course, cannot be too flat and clean ; and if that flatness is not carried right down into the fetlock joint, they will become every day more liable to grow, "woolly," or fly altogether. Depth of girth he must have, or his pipes and heart have no room to play ; and if his back ribs are short, or he is what is termed "cut in two," he cannot stay. There must be strength in his loins, or he cannot jump, and power in his quarters, or he cannot go through dirt. Comfort demands that his head and neck should be properly put on, though there are bits made which will improve any horse with proper handling, and a little care in selection will soon determine the one to use. There are many other particulars on which the hypercritical might insist ; but if a horse is not found wanting in these leading points, there is not much serious fault in his shape.

The third essential, *courage*, is perhaps the most important of all, and it is one that is right fully appreciated in the country from which we write by men who have learnt by experience its true value. By a courageous horse, we mean one that has heart, pluck, and determination—that gives the whole strength of his will to enforce that of his rider, and that is not put out or cowed by the shortcomings of others ; a horse that throws his noble heart into the effort, knows a big fence for himself, glories in it, and *savages* at it if necessary ; one that will fling himself like a lion, whisking through the air like a rocket and jumping high and wide enough to clear the hidden-danger, however far set the rail or wide the ditch ; one that cares not if the oxer faces him, or the bullfinch looks black and impenetrable ; that is heedless of craning horsemen or galloping steeds ; that will pop out of a crowded road, or turn sharp round and fly over a brook ; one that will come again and again in a severe run, and, though tired and reeling, will pull all his energies together and make every fence certain. Such is the temperament that one seeks after and seldom finds ; and a man who has had one or two in his lifetime, possessing

this added to the other requirements we have spoken of, can hope to meet with few of their like again. Blood, of course, has a great voice in the matter ; and so we repeat, get as much as you can, so long as it is not at the expense of bone and size. But if you could obtain a clean thoroughbred with all the other qualities above enumerated, you would have a horse fit to win the Derby at once. No animal is perfect, so we have only touched upon the leading features of our *beau idéal* ; but, though much has been omitted that would be necessary to constitute perfection, a horse fulfilling all the conditions we have given would be quite as near it as anything we have ever seen in Leicestershire.

BIG HORSES VERSUS LITTLE ONES.

JANUARY 28TH, 1871.

A FEW words in answer to the letter of the "Practical Man" from the provinces, which appeared in the *Field* of January 21st, 1871. The remarks evidently emanated from one as experienced as practical ; but, with regard to the first point on which he touches, he must allow us to remove a misconception. Let us assure him that we neither hold with the oft-repeated sentiment of Col. Greene, who, when asked if he had ever ridden in Yorkshire, replied in horror, "What, hunt in a ploughed country! Sooner read a book!" nor do we follow Mr. Davenport Bromley, who "counts the swell provincial lower than the Melton muff." We speak not disparagingly of the provinces, nor slightly of the man who hails from them. On the contrary, we look upon the plough countries as having been created for a double purpose—viz., as a nursery for youth and a refuge for old age. All the best sportsmen here learnt the art of hunting far away from Melton, and only after a novitiate in the provinces came to break a lance in the tilting ground of the Shires. Naturally enough, a man in the heyday of his strength

and keenness, having earned his spurs in remoter climes, yearns to try his mettle where he will meet foemen more worthy of his steel. Cock of his own dunghill, he longs to fight a main in a nobler arena and against sterner stuff. Let not our brethren of the clay "get their backs up," for all who know the historic lore of Leicestershire have read of the doughty champions who have appeared to bear all before them. With nerve still unshaken, and with knowledge and experience gained by patient study of hounds daily working their way by inches over the cold fallows, they teach many a lesson of how to watch and how to ride to those greyhound sportsmen who have never been entered to the solid realities of hunting, and who have only been taught to recognise the harum-scarum of a burst. Who, if old enough, does not remember—or, if younger, has not read of—Sir Miles of Gloucestershire, of 15st. or more, who made all Melton shiver in their shoes? Have not we, of our own experience, seen Hope Barton of the Bads-worth come down to hold his own—aye, and more than his own—against the pink of High Leicestershire? And these were but casual visitors; whereas we would point to the *absolute necessity* of every man's being broken to quiet hunting elsewhere before he can ride fairly and with justice to hounds over the grass. In the same way we consider that no huntsman can arrive at the *summum bonum* of excellence who owes his education solely to the Shires. In a cold-scenting country he is continually called upon to exercise the virtue of *thinking for himself*—a necessary quality which, we read, "the Red Prince" is ever impressing on his generals, and to which 'tis said all their marvellous success is attributable. A huntsman who has derived all his lessons from the quick work—of which he, as first whip, is called upon to fulfil the quickest part—with a crack pack, is too prone to become flashy in attempts to be brilliant, and is sadly wanting in that patient perseverance which is all needful to true hunting. Perhaps he is often pushed into this fault by the overwhelming pressure of his field; but this is one of the difficulties he wants the art to con-

tend against. Witness Peter Collinson and his black and tan pack that worked such wonders in North Warwickshire ! Simply they came out of a country where they had learnt to depend on themselves. They *would* not be ridden over, heeded nothing round them, and showed extraordinary sport in consequence. But to return to the point of riding. No one will gainsay that a man in the prime of his strength and nerve will find greater, more perfect, and more frequent delight in going to hounds in a Grass Country than elsewhere.

Who'd not rather kiss
A duchess than a milkma

And thus it is that ambition leads so many to take the first opportunity of migration thither. And small blame to them ! for would "it not show vilely in them to desire small beer ?"

Secondly, we all look forward to a time of life when hunting shall still hold forth the same enjoyment, but when we are scarcely fit to compete with younger men, and a fall becomes a matter of serious consideration. Then, like many a true old hound who has lost his dash and pace, it will be necessary to draft us ; and we hope to find a pleasant refuge in a plough country, there to study daily the sport we love so well, and put off almost indefinitely the horrors of superannuation. In this way Assheton Smith settled quietly down in Hampshire in his old age, and hunted on long after most of us can expect to live. He found his hunting in the woods and over the light fences of the chalk, while he could still remind himself of the Shires by a quick gallop over the downs.

Of the other point on which the "Practical Man" speaks —viz., as to our statement of *size* being essential to a Leicestershire horse—we have only to thank him for so completely backing up our opinion by instancing exceptions that prove the rule. For that the small horses he mentions *were* exceptional is shown by the notoriety they gained ; just as every case of a policeman caught sinning is eagerly blazoned forth, and many credulous

folks are ready to believe at once that the whole body of our guardian bluebottles are scoundrels of the deepest dye. Moreover, we contend that most if not all of the instances he quotes scarcely come under the denomination of *little horses* at all, though they only measured up to a low standard. Certainly, Mr. Darby's two were, as he says, very thick ones, besides being nearly thoroughbred ; in fact, they were enormous, and had weight and size enough for anything. At the present time Capt. Boyce is hunting (or rather would be if he could) a horse of not more than 15·2, *Smoke* by name, seventeen years of age, which is quite a standing dish in Melton, and is likely to carry him for many seasons yet to come. But then these are essentially what we call *little big ones* in Leicestershire ; they have all the weight and strength of a taller horse, with the rare addition of speed and activity. We can tell him of yet a better example, which we wonder he did not bring forward—viz., Osbaldeston's famous *Piplin* mare, which many of the elder generation of sportsmen must still remember—in fact, it was one of these who described the prodigy to us : “ A great *castle* of a mare—a thoroughbred carthorse if you can imagine such a thing. Osbaldeston *challenged the world with her* to run for a thousand pounds over four miles of country. He gave £200 for her (which was a long price in those days, about 1811), with the stipulation that she was to be returned when he gave over hunting her ; and she carried him nine seasons without ever being off her work, after which she bred three foals. He bought her after seeing Tom Sebright (who had been given a mount on her) jump a six-foot wall of Sir M. Cholmeley's in the Burton country.” “ What height was she ? ” we asked. “ Well, a *little over 14·3*, ” was the answer !

A SWIM OVER THE WREAKE.

ON Monday, February 6th, the Quorn at last called together the whole body of their supporters to rise from their dismal slumber, and hold a merry meeting under brightest auspices. Three days' honest thaw, backed up by a warm sou'-wester, had completely expunged all marks of the evil reign of the ice king ; and from all sides they once more trooped gladly forth to wet their spurs over a fair course.

The meet was at Six Hills—or, rather, *was to have been*, for there was scarcely a meet at all—the hounds moving off along the Fosse at the proper time, while the field dribbled up *en route*, or at the covert side. There were several new faces to greet the spring ; and more than one well-known one, who had made his mark before, now appeared with full intent to do the same again—the type of the latter variety being Captain Smith, boldest of bold Carabiniers, who may console himself for the frost with the knowledge that the rails will now crack as easy again as in the autumn. Lord Wilton was not able to put in an appearance, though said to be working fast towards recovery. But one who loves the grass countries almost as well was there ; and if he did not see matter for a sonnet in the good hunting run that marked the re-opening day, it was that his horse thought no more of giving Whyte Melville a crumpler than if he had never heard of Digby Grand, or else considered that the author of Market Harborough ought to have been with Mr. Tailby at Marston. Well, whatever may have been the vagaries of his steed, it did one good to see him joining in a scene that no one can depict like him, and taking in a picture of which he loses no detail.

At 11.30, or shortly before, the hounds were thrown into Cossington Gorse, and roused its inmate and its echoes almost immediately, making every yellow blossom quiver on its stem,

and every nerve of bold Reynard turn to stone within him with their wild music. There was a maddening scent in covert, and they dusted the enemy without a second's relief, as he obstinately refused to face the open. Keen as mustard, and anxious to be away as girls are to be married, the men of Quorn crowded, shivering with impatience, at the gate at the top corner, drinking in greedily the melody that had been so long denied them.

All we hope and all we love
Finds a voice in this blithe strain,
Which wakens hill and wood and rill,
And vibrates far o'er field and vale.
And which Echo, like the tale
Of old times, repeats again.

The fox evidently meant to have taken to the grass if he could ; for more than once he came right up to the road, but, too bashful to run the gauntlet of so many eyes, was forced at last to tread the plebeian plough, and break over the bastard tract that gives Segrave unenviable notoriety as the mud-pie of the hunt. A figure of eight between Cossington, Segrave, Thrussington Wolds and Walton Thorns (approaching within a field the two last-named coverts), is quite sufficient to say about the line pursued in this part of the run. The scent that was so sweet in covert was smothered in the dirt stockings that clung to the vulpine pads ; but the pack, though bursting with excitement, never lost their heads, but used them to exemplary purpose, picking out every yard, and dashing on whenever there was an opportunity. The deep going told terribly on the horses after their long vacation, and froth and bellows were the chief features of the symptoms—though, be it admitted, the metropolitan grooms had done wonders by their charges in spite of all difficulties. To well-bred hunters there could only be a sense of degradation in being called upon to waste their energies in such a sea of slush. “ Slothering ” knee deep at their fences, or pulled up in front of a contemptible briar-and-dyke, “ restless they pawed the ungenial soil, snuffed the gross air.”

At length Reynard was enabled to make his original line; so, crossing the Fosse Road, he threw off his clogs, and took to the clean carpet of turf towards Ragdale. Leaving the Hall well on the left, he went straight for Hoby, over the green pastures that seemed laid down for a burst; but, though hounds hunted nicely all the way, they could scarcely make a gallop of it, and there was plenty of time to choose the few weak places that presented themselves, over a line that under other circumstances would be most difficult to steer. His point was a drain below the rector's garden, and nearing this the pace freshened. Finding it closed against him, he took a ticket for Brooksby station, but, deciding against the claims of the Midland, he turned through the miller's spinney, and held for a mile along the banks of the Wreake. Generally "a quiet and placid stream," the far famed river now "rushed like a torrent to the sea," and he forebore to trust himself to its tide till after passing Thrussington Mill. A moment's pause on the brink, and seventeen couple of spotted heads were battling across the twenty yards of water on his track. One gentleman in black followed suit, and shook himself gratefully as, with the assistance of the frightened miller, he emerged in safety. Without entering Bleakmoor, the hounds ran alongside the railway for a field, crossed the line, and, entering on the sound inclosures beyond, ran well over the hill, across the Leicester and Melton turnpike, to the left of Rearsby Village. Two fields further came the poor allotments, the benevolent founders of which could never have intended that a wretched little urchin should act as a scarecrow to spoil the finish of a good run. A check of two or three minutes, with no one to take hold of the hounds, put the fox three fields ahead instead of one. At Underwood's Lodge, another brace of foxes were in front of the pack, and to make confusion worse confounded, a young hound called attention to the line of a hare, and they were at fault again. At this point Thrussington Bridge let us all up; the huntsman got a view of the beaten fox just ahead, but with only five hounds

could do little more than ride after him ; and by the time the pack were together Gaddesby village was reached. Reynard was seen in the shrubberies round Mr. Cheney's house, but got the better of his pursuers by some means ; no more could be made of him, and he escaped, after upwards of an hour and a half's almost uninterrupted running. From the farthest points—viz., Walton Thorns to Gaddesby—the distance was but little over six miles as the crow flies ; but a great amount of ground was covered. The latter part of the run was over a beautiful grass country ; the jumping was safe and big ; the keen, steady hunting of the musical ladies was beyond all praise ; and, had it not been for the unfortunate intervention of the river, this would have been entitled a very fine hunting run. The kill that was just missed would have made it undoubtedly so, for the hounds thoroughly deserved their fox ; and, though it may be playing into the hands of Mr. Freeman to say it, we might borrow from the *Times* of to-day and quote the words of the French king who gave it as his opinion that the smell of a dead enemy is always sweet. It may be mentioned that the horses of huntsman and whips gave obvious proof that one year's good corn will not suffice to take the place of dealer's condition ; but time, the root of all training, will easily correct this, and Mr. Coupland himself was throughout ever ready and able to lend a hand at a difficulty.

FINE RUN WITH THE PYTCHLEY FROM NORTH KILWORTH.

WEDNESDAY, February 8th, assembled a more fashionable host to array themselves at North Kilworth than have been seen with the Pytchley this year. For a wonder, or rather as a pleasant surprise, Mr. Craven did not march off at 10.45 sharp, but gave his followers time not only to assemble, but

even to get on their horses. Carriages there were, as there always are at the Pytchley meets, in greater quantity and greater quality than elsewhere; and, moreover, there was a much larger preponderance of hard-riding men than have of late composed the field. A good many of these perhaps came out solely for their gallop, or, as Roake in his agony took it, with malice aforethought to disconcert his views; but still it was more like a return to old form to see not only Coventry, Rugby, and the neighbourhood, but Harborough, Aldershot, London, and Windsor, sending worthy champions to deck the gathering and give the hunt an impetus. That they did give it an impetus is undeniable, though it is equally so that the exuberant scent of the morning alone prevented that impetus from being a mischievous one.

From Kilworth Village to Kilworth Sticks is the accepted order of things; and the ordinary routine was strictly followed out by finding the old dog fox that has this season whisked his brush at them twice before already. Now, with a rattling scent they drove him over the two or three fields to the Harborough and Lutterworth turnpike, and without a pause past the little spinneys below Kilworth House. The going was all grass, the pace as good as it need be, and the fences delightful—being stiff enough and frequent enough even for a “spring captain,” (an epithet that the inhabitants use when they begin to find that they themselves are growing sticky and can scarcely keep pace with the visitors). With the hounds close glued to him, he crossed the road between North and South Kilworth, and, without a moment to expend on his usual dodge of skirting the Old Covert of the latter place, struck at once over the river Avon for Hemplow. Those who were well with the hounds were scarce hindered a moment, for a sandy bottom enabled them to jump over the rails on the near side and splash readily out again; and, dipping under the railway, which held out a convenient arch just in front, they stole a march on all who were riding cunning. Consequently, as the hounds raced on to the Hemplow Hills there were scarcely a

dozen men with them—among whom the Devonshire green collar of Mr. Downall was conspicuously prominent.

Five-and-thirty minutes to the hills, *brilliant* both for pace and country, and delightful to men who can find joy in watching hounds that have *nose enough to bring out their speed*, and with whom to push a good horse along in good company is a true happiness.

Throughout the gallop Mr. Muntz's sturdy figure continually caught the eye, and showed that they know a thing or two with the Atherstone, for which, perhaps, the other side of Leicestershire did not give them credit. Mr. Trotter one always sees; for whenever he gets a fall everybody is in the proper place to see him get up again. To-day he only got five; but as he rode three fresh horses, there was every excuse for him. By the way, speaking seriously, the Rugby country is suffering the greatest loss in the departure of the Coventry detachment. No corps ever before sent such a knot of hard and good riders to represent them here as the Fifth, in the persons of Captains Kennedy and Pritchard, Messrs. Soames and Trotter; nor will the country soon forget the sporting enterprise of the little party in entertaining more than the whole neighbourhood a month ago.

A SPURT FROM SCRAPTOFT.

FRIDAY, February 10th, with the Quorn, was what might be termed a disappointing day; for, though there was something for everybody, and a great deal of galloping, jumping, and hunting, the bright prospects ever just failed of fulfilment, and the sweets of perfection were two or three times tasted only sufficiently to cause double disappointment at their loss. Still there was a good run, though the fact that it just missed being the very best of the season causes a feeling of annoyance at the accident that alone spoiled its character.

Baggrave Hall was the meet; and, as hunting men don't often stop at home for rain, there was almost as strong a muster as usual, except that the place of rendezvous furnished the sole representative of the governing sex, in the person of Mrs. Burnaby. Rain and wind had been hard at work from daybreak; and the weather might have entered into an engagement to give Cording and Edmiston an advertisement meet, shapeless figures and neutral tints being the order of the day. As noon came on and the sky brightened, the outer shells were gradually discarded, and marvellous costumes disclosed, such as a Quorn Friday has seldom had to blush for. It would appear that Nathan rather than Poole had been called in to protect High Leicestershire against the elements, or that Brian O'Lynn had been the purveyor of breeches in preference to Tautz and Anderson. Charity forsooth would have begun at home, had a large consignment at once been made to the French Peasant Relief Association. But where so many were peculiar, no man could feel the *désagrément* of being particular; and the way in which the fancy dresses made light of the big country calls one to apologise for remarking on them.

Scraptoft Gorse is usually looked upon as a certainty, and, the kill in covert that solemnised the last visit had had plenty of time to sink into forgetfulness. The hounds were scarcely among the furze before the master's horn was heard on the village side. Excited and eager the pack rushed out to the call. Picking up the line at once, they dashed off towards Scraptoft, and ran two fields parallel to the scrambling crowd in the lane.

A fair open outlet scarce hindered a moment; but two hundred choice spirits will hinder themselves in their eagerness, and the gateway should have been six times as broad to meet the views of those who strove to pass.

What thronging, dashing, raging, rushing!
What spouting, babbling, crowding, bustling
As heaven and earth were overturning!

At such a time half a minute more or less will make all the difference in a quick thing. Not only will hounds get such a start while you are baulked and jammed that you have to ride and turn only with the stragglers, but so many men get before you that all the delight of taking your fences as you see them, is lost. But in this case the very first fence put all on equal terms, for an oxer planted in a deep dip made men turn right and left for a feasible spot. Mr. Foster kindly broke down the far rail on the left, while some equally venturesome spirit performed the same philanthropic office on the right; and, this exceptional difficulty past, the field spread out to take all that offered, and raced to keep on terms with the flying pack.

Circling round from Scrattoft Village, men were loosed over the fine pastures alongside the Keyham Brook for a mile or so, till bearing to the left they crossed the bottom and pointed for the Foxholes. Falls and casualties on every side—to see, to hear of, and to note afterwards in crushed hats and dirty coats. Falls, not of potterers or blunderers, but of the *artistes* of the riding world—falls attributable only to the anxious desire to be with the hounds, and that, if they threw the perpetrators completely out for the time, at least served to open a vacancy, of which there were scores ready to avail themselves. A dozen of these we might instance; but, if Mr. Turner, of Stoke, had any feelings of regret for the lost place entailed by his bold essay at the four unjumpable ash rails, he may yet find consolation in the fact that he acted the best of Samaritans to his followers; and, as Rosalind said of her lover Orlando “Though it be pity to see such a sight, it well became the ground.”

The Keyham Bottom has ever been a bugbear in these parts, and many a resident has pronounced it impracticable; but the great wall of China would have been charged under such circumstances; and a summersault and a scramble opened two breaches in the knotted fringe that guarded the far bank, and half a dozen men were over almost without a pause.

At a steeplechase pace they flew over the grazing grounds towards Carver's Spinney, and men settled in their saddles and thought themselves in the run of the season; but—and here comes the detestable *but*—the Quorn seem now to be suffering from a plurality of foxes, for a brace were ahead; the hounds were baffled for a moment; Mr. Carver (who was on foot on his ground, and is far too good a sportsman to allow any consideration of wheat or seeds to mar a run) had viewed one towards the Foxholes; and a division of opinion among the pack ensued, which spoilt the best thing of the year.

As it was, this thirteen or fourteen minutes' burst could not be beaten for pace and country. The hounds never hesitated a moment, and the most determined malefactor could not have overridden them. Little time was lost; but without the happy vigour of the first part they ran slowly round towards Houghton, entered Mr. Tailby's beautiful country on that side, crossed the Billesdon Brook at a part where no difficulty but a great deal of splashing accompanied the transit, filled the apron of the old lady at the tollbar with coppers, and her heart with gratitude (to judge by the sharp yelps of "Thank you, sir; thank you, sir," that rained from her toothless mouth), and so round into the Coplow.

The field generally now appeared to make up their minds for a cessation of hostilities, and attention devoted to lunch or changing horses was the cause of many being left in the lurch. Three foxes broke immediately and almost simultaneously in different directions. One made for Quenby, and was allowed to pursue his way in peace; while a second stole away from Botany Bay with only half the pack at his heels, followed by the huntsman and three of the field; and ran a merry spin towards Scrattoft as far as Old Ingarsby, and thence round by Hungerton Foxholes and Quenby Hall back to the Coplow—at a pace quite fast enough to take all the steel out of their horses. A third slipped away in like manner below Mr. Freer's house (the persistent music must have been a strange aggra-

vation to a good sportsman kept at home by illness); and, with only Sir Frederick Johnstone, Messrs. Dawson, Murietta, Foster, White Melville, Major Paynter, and half a dozen others in attendance, six or seven couple of hounds ran him fast and furious for some distance over the same fine line which had just been traversed the other way. But, alas, the two whips soon cut in to stop the unorthodox fun; and the culprits, biped and quadruped, had to return with their tails between their legs. The other run fox had by this time regained the Coplow; the re-united pack quickly pushed him through for a short circle on the other side, and after he had run one more tiring ring through the Billesdon Plantations towards Tilton Wood, round by Tilton Village back to the same plantation, he was killed. This terminated a day very fatiguing for horses, but containing a good deal of pleasure for oneself.

THE PRINCE OF WALES AT MELTON.

THE week ending March 18th, 1871, was made memorable at Melton by the visit of the Heir Apparent, who came to stay with Sir Frederick Johnstone, and enjoy a day or two from the metropolis of foxhunting. Having virtually begun his season with Mr. Chaplin and the Burton (after an essay or two in the neighbourhood of Windsor), he has once more honoured the Shires with his presence, and come to taste again the sweets of the grass countries. His last visit was marked by a first-class run with the Belvoir from Hose Gorse; while this year the incident of his visit was the smart burst with the Quorn from Cossington—the difference being that the former was on a state-day, and the latter was the result of a quiet by-day, extemporised solely with a view to showing him a gallop. This time the elements alone ruled over the sport of his three days' visit, showed themselves no respecters of persons, and all but suc-

ceeded in thwarting every preconceived plan for his amusement. Even a loyal duke had to bow before their omnipotent force, and essayed in vain to give the special meet at Stonesby a worthy character.

His Royal Highness arrived at Melton on the evening of Tuesday, March 14th, accompanied by Colonel Kingscote, Master of the Horse, Colonel Ellis, equerry, and Mr. Knollys, private secretary. The choicest coverts of the Belvoir were reserved for the next day, as may be gathered from the names of Coston and Newman's Gorse. On the Pytchley side the same morning the ground lay four inches deep in snow, but the Duke's territory, on the contrary, was a foot deep in dust, and there was not a particle of scent to assist the brilliant and untiring efforts of Gillard and his clever whip. The ground was hard as iron, and the day remarkable only for the huntsman's intense desire to show sport. The Prince evidently meant going had the opportunity offered, for he was to be seen filling up the idle time in picking out clean timber, and amusing himself with the ugly stiles that abound in that district.

"Go, get me hither paper, ink, and pen," and let me tell of the screaming burst that the Prince has seen with the Quorn. To meet his wishes for a gallop over Leicestershire without the crowd of an advertised show meet, a quiet by-day was arranged for Ragdale on Thursday, March 16, and the fixture kept so snug and secret that even the select received the notice only as they woke to gaze doubtfully on the snow-covered pastures. Spite of the drifts of snow that filled the furrows and the ditches, a small body of true royalists had collected at the venerable manor house by one o'clock; but Mr. Henton's old cellar was the only morning draw, while a chain of vedettes was thrown out to give notice of any approach from Melton. The solitary horseman who at last was seen spurring on amain over the white-sheeted plain from Shoby came only to tell that hosts and guests had agreed that the country was at present unrideable. The hounds were to remain in the village till another hour or two of Sol's influence should mend matters; and a time was named

for throwing off that would have made John Peel jump out of his grave had he heard that hounds were fixed to meet when he would have been toasting at dinner "the fox he had killed in the morning." "Hope deferred makes the heart sick;" so even the most loyal yielded to the pressure of hunger and a hailstorm, and dispersed, some to return no more, but most to lay in a foundation for a second pilgrimage in the afternoon. The hours passed by, and Time, that turns our hair to snow, in this case worked the part of Mrs. Allen's *Zylobalsamum* to the green sward, restoring, at least in part, its natural hue; and soon after three the Prince and his Melton train had arrived, and men were again jogging into Ragdale from all sides. Nothing could possibly be more picturesque than the scene, as one looked down from the Hoby road, where it overhangs the village, on the gay-coloured group clustered in front of the quaint old manor house (once the seat of part of the Ferrers family, but now a farmer's homestead), the hounds dotted about in the centre, and a string of carriages with brightest burdens in the road alongside. An enthusiastic photographer was on the spot, and if he succeeded in reproducing but the leading features of the picture his sale should indeed be a ready one, though the photographic art must have made great steps of late if that impatient toss of his horse's head does not transform his Royal Highness into a Centaur, and Mr. Henry Chaplin is not looming over the whole background like a huge spectre horseman. Beside these there were standing (or, in most cases, moving) Colonel Ellis, Lady Catherine Coke, Lord Grey de Wilton, Mr. Gilmour, Mr. Coupland, Macbride, the whips, and the hounds; and on foot, by the Prince's horse, stood the farmer, with mouth, eyes, nose, and every nerve expressive of intense delight, while some fifty horsemen gazed on the operation.

This process—one to which royalty probably becomes hardened by almost daily experience—being ended, the pack were taken to Thrussington Wolds, and all the polish of beautiful garments and undeniable "get ups" at once smothered in the mud and slush of the lanes and rides. But before going further let me

not omit to speak of the grand horseflesh that greeted one's eyes at the meet and in the field. Surely so many glorious cattle (the number of riders being considered) never turned out together as now appeared to do honour to our future king, and credit to the gallop in store. Each man had brought his best horse, or horses, for the occasion ; and when we consider that the pick of Sir Frederick Johnstone's, Mr. Gilmour's, Messrs. Behrens', Lord Grey de Wilton's, Mr. Coupland's, and half a dozen other crack stables (with Capt. Boyce's Waterloo, showing money's worth at every point), had been saddled, no eulogium can be thought extravagant. The royal horses were shape and quality itself, the Prince's mount to-day (a dark brown) being to all appearance as perfect a specimen of a high-bred weight-carrying hunter as could be seen ; though, as the event proved, they naturally lacked the forward condition of horses who have been taking their weekly turn all the winter. Indeed, it is a fact one cannot help noting, that even in Leicestershire, and in studs that have never been allowed to remain idle when they could be worked, horses are only now beginning to assume the real hard state of condition when they can gallop through a quick thing without being blown, and jump fence after fence without distressing themselves. The broken winter and the lengthened frost have put them where we should expect them to be about Christmas in ordinary seasons, and only the extreme paucity of severe runs since the frost has prevented the fact making itself more unpleasantly apparent.

The fox from Thrussington Wolds was far more selfishly concerned for his own safety than sensible of the honourable task he was called upon to perform, for he slipped through the New Covert, leaving the field to follow through two boggy ploughs, and doubled under the hedge at the road. Unable to make out his line, the hounds were trotted three miles back through this benighted region ; and Cossington Gorse, the hope of the day and the anxious master's last support, was reached. Had the Prince now gone home, what a notion would he have carried away of our boasted Leicestershire ! And could not the Burton

Master have jeered at the green pastures and flying fences of which we talk so much, relating to them in Lincolnshire how he had found only rotten sport and sticky plough; or Col. Kingscote have bid the men of Gloucestershire hug themselves over their Greatwood run, telling them that in the Shires in the present day, they might live with hounds on foot!

By a happy stroke of genius the hounds were thrown into the gorse (without regard to wind), so as to cut off any outlet on the side of the dread district where precious time had already been spent; the field were drawn up in the road well clear of the covert, and there were none of the usual crowd of foot people to mob poor Reynard at his first attempts. Scarce a cheer had broken the stillness ere there came travelling down the wind a clattering, happy chorus, a message of hope and promise. No need of cheer or holloa to press them to the cry; every hound had it, and every hound meant business. But so did their gallant quarry, caring not to hide or twist, but ready at once to accept the challenge. Taking his path straight through the thicket, he arrived at its edge before the noisy throng he appeared to despise were half-way across its breadth, trotted quietly over the road before the horsemen, looked round as if to take stock of the company, whisked his white tag in the face of Royalty, then turned out of the road, and cantered quietly away over the grass. Not a single holloa marked his exit; the body of good sportsmen were too intent on a run to imperil their chances by the noisy exultation that too often nips sport in the bud, and only a low murmur of satisfaction broke the stillness. But, Reynard once clear of the road, the master was on his track in a moment, cheered the hounds to the spot with voice and horn, and one on the top of the other they came dashing forth, open-mouthed and bristle-backed. No restraining voice was wanted with the choice little field so eagerly burning to be away; the gate out of the road was quickly pitched out of its fastening, and one and all waited for the opening note that should give the word "Go." Half a dozen couple burst out together, summoned sisters and brothers to the call, fairly

crashed down the open slope, and gave the signal for a start. Like the torrent from an opened floodgate came the keen horsemen in pursuit. The first fence was a stake-and-bound, with a drop beyond, but this was taken almost without a pull. The perils of an anthill-covered field never diminished the pace, nor did the thick bullfinch taken sideways to the left. With a scent that seemed to madden them, the hounds breasted the steep hill in front. "Oh, what an accursed gate!" in a fence that might defy the charge of an elephant. "Lift up the latch, sir, while I push! lift it, for Heaven's sake, lift it!" Half a second seems an hour as the pack bound over the crest; but never was gate swung quicker. Lord Calthorpe strides up the hill on a grand bay horse, that a slack rein would scarce stop from winning the Liverpool; Mr. Knollys sits back and pounds away alongside, determined to see all he can on his one mount with the Quorn (and for many a year will his dreams of glory contain a picture of Sir Frederick's hog-maned chestnut); Lord Grey de Wilton and Captain Coventry steal quietly along a length or two behind, with Captain Johnstone settling down as if he had been for weeks in hard training for the event. Now they were pointing straight for Rearsby, as if the Wreake and its repellent stream were meant; but so good a fox had no intention of dealing unfairly by his field, and, with a nobler purpose, fixed upon such a line as raised his followers to the seventh heaven (or in individual cases lowered them to the snow). The village of Thrussington bothered him for a moment, and he was forced to turn along the road for a few hundred yards before striking off again for his point. The body of the pack were over it in a second, with Mr. Henry Chaplin jumping into the road at their heels. Their noses were down immediately, and as they wavered here and there Macbride took hold of them for a cast forward; but meanwhile two couple had turned under the hedge, never leaving the line; when fairly satisfied with themselves caught the ear of Col. Kingscote, who was riding on the left; and a holloa brought up the huntsman and their comrades, with the loss of no more time than served to make it a five-and-twenty minutes burst

instead of twenty. Quick and eager, they dashed away into the valley beyond Thrussington Brickkilns, and struck into the stiffest part of the Quorn country, running straight and hard as when they started. The country rode safely and well on the low ground, though the hills were still deep in snow. A new plashed fence, laid towards you as only the cunning of a Leicestershire hedge-cutter can devise against a boring ox (and with a wide-cut ditch beyond), seemed but a bit of by-play to Major Paynter's loan pony, that could scarce have held his chin over it. Capt. Molyneux and the half dozen on the right got over with a sense of satisfaction, and galloped hard to join the more fortunate body whom the hounds had favoured. The next field put all the leading lot on equal terms ; for one of the bugbears of the hunt (known as the 'Ox Brook) interposed a stoppage to the direct route, and necessitated a hundred yards' scurry round to a bridge. That it was practicable was proved by one to whom ignorance of the danger was bliss, and who hit off a place where he got safely over, and tailed up the hill after the hounds. On the summit there were twenty men almost abreast, and widely spread, as they flew down over the well-known Hoby bullock fences. May I live to carry age and be as quick and hard as Col. Forester, who was about the "top o' the hunt" at this point. "Forrard ! you beauties, forrard !" as they chatter gaily through the very fences that brought such grief in the famous "Bobtail run of '68" (53 minutes without a check, and a kill in the open). Sir Frederick Johnstone on his little brown horse clears the first oxer in the true style that no man in England can beat ; the hog-maned chestnut is over close beside him ; the Master knees the rail beyond and comes down a cracker ; while Lord Grey de Wilton rolls over close after him, his brilliant chestnut having the misfortune to pitch just where the post had been knocked out. Crash ! bang ! on the right, like the bursting of a 68-pounder, comes Macbride ; the dark red chestnut is a bit blown, but he has got his forelegs over and staggers up again to do the same at the next fence. Of the rest, some get over, some get down, while others thrust through the holes that have been



The Master knees the rail and comes down a cracker ; Lord Grey de Wilton rolls over close after him. Crash ! bang ! comes Macbride. The Prince's horse feels the pace, sticks his head out and refuses obstinately.

To face page 24.

made for them. Col. Ellis is well up ; but the Prince's horse feels the pace terribly, shows a latent temper of which he has given signs before, sticks his head out, and refuses obstinately. The ugliest line in the three counties would not stop Captain Riddell ; but the horse of one equally hard has broken down some time ago, and Mr. Chapman is leading him along and cursing his luck a mile behind. Two more " storming " oxers *in succession* still further thin the field ; the forty-acre grazing grounds of ridge-and-furrow call for steeplechasing condition ; and as they enter the Hoby and Ragdale road, the company is choice indeed. Was it due to failing breath or shaken legs that one noticed three instances of doubling an oxer ? A hundred yards down the road the leading rank pull up short for half a moment, then sharp through the thick thorn fence, which the customers bore at once in half-a-dozen places. What music rings out as the charmers close up and race over the turf, eager for the blood they feel to be just before them ! Scarcely so musical, but none the less excitedly, comes the fierce yell of the huntsman as he cheers them to the head, and with still increasing pace they strain over the broad pastures. Following the valley, they head straight for Shoby Scoles, Capt. Coventry, on a horse of Mr. J. Behrens', sailing along on the right in the cool, determined style which has placed many a good steeplechase to his credit ; Macbride is close behind him, while just to the left are Sir Fred. Johnstone, Mr. Ernest Chaplin, Capt. Barclay, Col. Kingscote, and Lord Calthorpe. Half-a-dozen others are lying handy on either flank, but one ought to be furnished, like a Chinese god, with eyes all over one's head, to see everybody at such a time, when, too, it takes more than any ordinary mortal's discrimination to spot the weak place in each fence. "Who's your hatter ?" yells Sir Frederick, as a man comes piecemeal through a thick old blackthorn, with his hat flattened on his head like a mortar board. The retort follows in a practical form from an unexpected quarter. Had he been able to see what those behind him could, he would have known that the little brown horse, who had been galloping and jumping better than

the biggest, was now doing as much work with his tail as his legs, and scarce were the words out of his rider's mouth ere he rose too soon at a stake-and-bound, and landed the worthy baronet on his own Lincoln and Bennett.

The fox had kept close along under the hedge that borders the little brook leading down from the Scoles, and, with no room to spread, half the pack were left without other part to perform than to echo doubly the noisy testament of the leaders to the burning scent. Could the sceptics who say that the high-bred hounds of the grass countries run mute have heard the rolling chorus, as the Quorn went at top speed close behind their fox, surely they would never dare to give tongue on the same subject again.

Just before reaching the covert, Reynard took a sudden twist to try the earths in the little spinney above ; but this hope failed him, and he was fain to thread the nestling nook of Shoby Scoles. Fox and hounds were in together ; Col. Kingscote, who had galloped round the top, viewed him attempting to make his exit and being headed back almost into the mouths of the hounds. But he slipped past them, found refuge in a rabbit hole, and saved his noble brush from hanging to the Prince's saddlebow. "Five-and-twenty minutes as good as it could be," was the verdict, approved by heaving flanks of steeds, and in many cases breathless condition of riders. The cast round the hill to make all safe, before the huntsman was assured of the "gone to ground," gave the needful few minutes to those whom mishap had detained on the way. The Prince was one of the first to appear, his horse showing palpable signs of the energetic influence that had been brought to bear upon him. Even Col. Jervoise's finished skill had been insufficient to turn one of Mr. Westley Richards's young ones into a practised hunter, though he had wasted no time in making up lost ground. Capt. Boyce, of course, was on the spot, for no man turns to hounds quicker than he does ; and Capt. Norton, too, had done full justice to his cloth. Another "soldier officer," Capt. King, had ridden the run conscientiously on a draught from the late Atherstone

establishment ; Lord Dupplin had gone well throughout ; and if there were others—and there *were* several—whom the excitement of the burst and anxiety for his own well-being prevented the historian from noticing, let them receive his apology in good part, and drink with him a bumper to the health and happiness of the Prince who enters so eagerly into our glorious pastime, and to the success of foxhunting in Leicestershire and elsewhere.

A word of sympathy is called for by the ill-luck of the best of our heavy weights, Mr. Fenwick, who lamed his horse in the early part of the afternoon, and so was debarred from cutting down the ox rails and the bulk of his light-weight comrades as he would have done. Another right good welter, the straight-going Rector of Rearsby—who on Hercules rode so gallantly over these very fences in the Marquis of Hastings' "Bobtail run" before alluded to—to-day was forced by the accidents of the hunting field into merely looking on from a hack.

FRIDAY, March 17.—Baggrave Hall was the place chosen by the Master of the Quorn where all due honour should be paid to the Prince ; and a right royal reception was prepared by Col. Burnaby. The preparations not only included such a *déjeuner de chasse* as would have done credit to Francatelli's overseeing and made the *gourmands* pocket the bills of fare for home discussion, but boasted of a completeness which only genius and good taste could have accomplished between them. At the entrance to the park was a triumphal arch, on which were inscribed the names of every master who has reigned over the Quorn for the last hundred years (Mr. Coupland, Mr. Musters, and Mr. Clowes—who were present—occupying the most prominent positions), and of all the chief coverts of the hunt ; with, overhead, a loyal inscription. The door of the hall, too, was decorated much in the same way. The mob were kept back by a strong force of police in such a manner that they could see and cheer to their hearts' content, and could neither grumble in consequence, nor make themselves intrusive.

The hounds were parading in front of the house shortly before

twelve, and the Prince was well up to time, for he drove up very soon afterwards, amid such a demonstration as nearly made the horses jump out of their skins, and the pack disperse all over the place in a state of excited bewilderment. What with the crowd cheering, grooms holloaing at their charges, the huntsman blowing his horn, and the whips rating, there was a Babel that would have stunned one who could not find relief in laughter. After H.R.H. had spent a quarter of an hour among the party assembled in the hall, he was called upon to perform a duty that must have been much more congenial to him than laying first stones or opening buildings for learned societies. This was sowing the first seeds of a new covert, which Col. Burnaby's liberality had prompted him to present to the hunt in commemoration of the occasion. The initials "A. E." were cut out in the turf, and the ceremony was gone through with all due solemnity. May many a good run in the future recall the natal day of the gorse, and the breath that screams the who-whoop shall mutter fervently "God bless the Prince of Wales!"

Having given such a welcome to his royal guest and a large field, the sporting host made all complete by finding a fox for them in one of the little plantations at the back of the house. The high ground of Baggrave and Lowesby was so choked with snow that riding was impossible—even by the Rugby division, who don't come all that way to go through gates. Otherwise, for point, distance, and country, and at times for pace, the run was a very sporting one. They kept going on continually, the line was straight and open, and under other circumstances a great deal of enjoyment might have been gathered. The course pursued was for a few fields towards Lowesby, then direct between Twyford village and Ashby Folville, round Thorpe Trussells to Great Dalby village; and leaving the latter on the left, past Gar-tree Hill, near which the fox was lost. He was dead beat in front of the hounds at Dalby village, and must have lain down in a hedgerow or got into a drain. At any rate he lived for another day. Ashby Pastures and Cream Gorse contained two vixen foxes, who were only saved from the pack by immense exertions

on the part of Mr. Coupland and his men. The Prince stayed as long as there was any hope of another gallop, returning to London with his suite by the 6.40 train; and 'tis to be hoped that the reminiscences he carried away were at least pleasant enough to induce him to let us see him ere long again in Leicestershire.

LAST QUORN MONDAY OF 1871.

A FEW welcome thunder showers on Sunday, March 26th, washed the dusty face of the country wonderfully. The ground underneath was still in pretty fair order, though, true, the turf was beginning to rattle noisily on the landing side of the fences; but a little moisture on the top was most needed, and its advent was just in time to give a character to the last Quorn Monday of the season.

Thus, on Monday, March 27th, twelve o'clock found all Quorn proper at Six Hills—a meet whose name is as intimately connected with cold and piercing winds as it is with good sport. To-day was no exception, for the weathercock had gone clean to the right-about; a strong north-easter almost turned the carriages into refrigerators, made one sit on one's fingers, and set one to think if one's hat string was sound. But a fine day's amusement made amends for all minor failings, though it sent one home in a state of mind in which present satisfaction was fighting hard against the feeling of sorrow that such good fun could be looked for so little longer. Horses' coats had already a patched and parti-coloured appearance—the autumnal tints of the waning season—and more than one good set of joints bore a foreign and pudding-like look, lending credibility to floating rumours that the trying work of the past month has put more than one strong stable literally on its last legs.

Our old friend was waiting for us at Cossington Gorse; and it seemed hard indeed that his gallant efforts in the Prince's cause should meet with so little gratitude, but that almost

before the stiffness had left his limbs he should again be called upon to defend his life. The hard-fought struggle had visibly affected the grand old gladiator. There was none of the smooth bright freshness that had marked his fury robes ; nor did he swing his brush with the same gay swagger as before. His coat was rough and shaggy, and the white tag that he had held out so proudly to the Royal gaze was now dragging in the dust. Yet did he not shrink from his task, but battled bravely as ever, and for the third time victoriously. One boon only did he ask, and that was a little time. So, instead of breaking at once boldly over the road, he took advantage of the want of scent in covert to collect himself. From some unexplained cause, the hounds were almost helpless in covert ; and had not Reynard made a personal *reconnaissance* under the eyes of the field, the occasional solitary and unconfirmed note that woke the stillness might have passed for the cry of juvenility over forbidden fruit. At last he pulled himself together for a start, and left his sanctuary for the perils of the open country. Breaking parallel to the road whereon the field were waiting, he just touched the cross road from Segrave, took a wide circle to the left, and, once having the lead in his hand, played his cards much as before. Twice previously had he baffled his pursuers by straight going over the grass, and now he meant to adopt the same open course of conduct ; so, choosing the meadows where the turf was springing fresh and sweet from the raindrops of yesterday, he left the plebeian plough behind, and, avoiding Sileby Village, headed straight for the Wreake. The hounds wanted no assistance from the huntsman, turning quickly and independently as they went on. Ratcliffe-on-the-Wreake was reached, and still he held on for the river, which could now be seen glistening below. "Thank goodness!" (or words to that effect) "there's a bridge this time," shouted Mr. Chapman, as the pack dipped into the valley, and the leading lot made for what was apparently a safe-conduct over. But, alas ! what held out so pleasant a promise in the distance, was but a snare ; and the arch that appeared to span the river

merely led over an arm running up to the railway wharf. The hounds settled the question at once, and the smooth surface of the water tempted two followers. The one (who probably went in to wash out the notoriety of a former essay) made good his exit, and, as we galloped for the Ratcliffe bridge, was seen holding on for bare life to the bridle of his horse, who had slipped up on the bank and threatened to roll back from whence he came. The other was bent on upholding the honour of the Vale of Belvoir, and he too got safely out, but, unfortunately, at the same spot where he went in. As it happened, the bath was an unrewarded one; for, though the hounds had come so fast and well down to the river, there was but a poor scent through the Rearsby Spinneys (where he was viewed close before them), and a few minutes more brought us up to our dripping friend—who must have concluded that it was a clear case of “*le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle.*” The half-hour up to the point of stoppage was all the real fun—and good indeed it was, with plenty of pace, plenty of jumping, and plenty of quick sterling hunting. I may add that no one rode straighter, or saw the run better, than did Mrs. Henry, on a clever flyer that seems as if he could not put a foot wrong. After passing in front of Mr. Woodcock’s house at Rearsby, they went slowly on for more than another half-hour by the left of Queniboro’ almost to Gaddesby; but the dust on wheat and fallows smothered his track, and they could do no more good.

As a last chance of picking up the hero of Cossington, the master had the hounds held on to Barkby Holt, the only probable place of refuge near at hand. His primary object failed; but, instead, he was rewarded with such a gallop as will cast a halo round the last days of the famous gorse.* Sacrilege indeed does it seem that a covert associated with such soul-stirring memories is about to be wiped off the face of the earth. A fox from Barkby has always been a synonymous term for a thrilling burst. No tract of country in Leicestershire is so consistent

* Barkby Gorse, erased at the end of this season, was shortly replanted by the Hunt near its old situation.

in carrying a scent; no country can boast of sounder turf or sweeter fences coming thick and frequent; and like a dying evidence of its powers was the run of this afternoon. 'Twas but a doubtful whimper that at first proclaimed a find; but at the sound of a known and favourite voice the ex-master* was seen to bristle up like an old hound, his eye to sparkle, and his



J. C. MUSTERS, ESQ.

cheery countenance to flush. Not a moment did the fox dwell, but skirting the wood, with the pack crashing close after him, broke out into the open for South Croxton. Within a field of the village he bore up for Baggrave Hall, the pace so terrific that none but those who left the covert with the hounds could ever get on terms with them, and so persistently did they cling to his brush, that before reaching the Hall he was forced right into the wind as he dipped the hill. After crossing the Bag-

* Mr. John Chaworth Musters, who on his retirement had lent his fine pack to the Quorn Country for this season.

grave Bottom—which Capt. Smith and someone else went in and out of, and where the breaking through of a faggot bridge, after the master and three or more had crossed, put a vast number out of the hunt—the first-named viewed him over the Lowesby Road, not fifty yards before the pack. Struggling in the teeth of the blast, he swung round by the village of Barsby, and strained every nerve to regain the shelter of his starting point. For a mile he kept alongside the Barsby Bottom, another chasm that bears a name of terror, the fences coming thick and strong, as a Stilton-making district demands. As far back as the memory of the oldest Quornite could carry him, the Barsby Bottom has called for respect and awe ; but hands down and a stout heart can grapple with many fancied impossibilities, and the same leader skimmed over it in his stride, brought half-a-dozen followers with him, but left half-a-dozen others (let their names be sacred !) to sound its depths. Without a check or pause of any sort, they breasted the high ground, passed the Queniboro' Spinney, and the pack dived into Barkby Gorse close at their fox's brush. A sheep dog in the covert led the hounds through into the wood, the fox lay down somewhere in the gorse, and hounds and huntsmen were cheated of their prey, though another hour was devoted to searching the thicket. Of the superb nature of the burst it is impossible to say too much. Computations of time vary up to five-and-thirty minutes, but it is incredible that, at the unceasing, unhesitating pace hounds ran, a fox could have lived or horses could have galloped for more than five-and-twenty. They went so fast that an indifferent start or a single false turn extinguished any man's chance at once. It is no flattery to repeat that Capt. Smith cut out nearly all the work, ably seconded (till the voracious gulf of Barsby was reached) by the hard delegate from Cheltenham, while Macbride was all through just where he should be, and the master lent his ruling presence to the very few who lived with the hounds from beginning to end.

Thus it will be seen how prominent a part Cossington Gorse played in the season 1870—71.

SEASON 1871-72.

A CLINKER WITH MR. TAILBY FROM OWSTON WOOD.



T last we have had a day's sport worth telling—and one that, however good the season may turn out, is not likely to find many rivals. So, instead of being sentenced to speak of runs that ought to have been and were not, of scent that ought to have existed and didn't, of foxes that ought to have gone straight and wouldn't, let me endeavour to convey some idea of Mr. Tailby's recent Tuesday. Beside it, all the other events of the week lapse into insignificance. To

keep the thread of history unbroken, it is merely necessary to mention that but little sport has marked the present season, previous to the lachrymation and wringing of hands called forth by last week's persistent frost.

The meet was advertised for Owston Wood, on Tuesday, November 28th. No part or end of the wood having been named as the rendezvous, every half dozen people had a meet of their own, according to their opinion, or the road

they came. Thus, there were parties formed above the village of Owston, in the middle ride, below and above the wood and in the road dividing it, and in many other places, besides large patrols of cavalry up and down each side. The hounds had not a meet at all, but immediately on their arrival were thrown into the wood. One of the famous old foxes—that have made men fear to be away when Owston is to be drawn, in spite of its slushy rides and many weary penances and disappointments—was awaiting them in the part known as the Little Wood. Taking them one turn through the length of both woods to clear his pipes, he brought them back to his starting point, and broke for Launde—the Beaux-Brummels of the two hunts issuing forth besmeared from head to foot, and vowing that henceforth brown cords and mahoganies should be their livery for the woodlands. Heading towards Launde Wood, he threatened his followers with a morning in the big woods; but, scorning the inviting shelter, he determined on doing honour to the phalanx of horsemen that looked to him to test their mettle, turned his head from the temptation, and held bravely on for the open. Round Withcote Hall they galloped without a fence to cross, crushing over the unjumpable bottoms by the narrow bridges, struggling through a couple of sticky ploughs (alone enough to stretch the girths of horses after the fortnight of frost and idleness); and there was no real settling down to work till Lady Wood was reached. A momentary hesitation, to make sure of his good intentions, and that he had left this too uncared for, ere, without having actually checked for an instant, the hounds took in the situation and commenced business in earnest. Then, starting off with the sudden unanimity of a covey from the stubble, they buckled to their task with a determined energy that quickly searched out the quality of man and horse. But the best of blood and the best of pluck were there in profusion; the picked men of three Hunts started on even terms; and where on ordinary occasions there might have been half a dozen to face a rasper, there were now fifty to race for it.

The country certainly was not like the oft-quoted Oxendon or Skeffington, where one may see occasional deeds of daring verging on the marvellous ; but the line was stiff and the pace tremendous, and a better and more numerous first-flight never rode to hounds than to-day. Among the large concourse out there were none of the crude elements that enter so prominently into a meet near a town ; but in this wild district everybody comes out from love of hunting, and a great proportion have little to learn in the matter of riding over a country.

One piece of deep plough some three fields after passing Lady Wood gave the hounds room enough to work and turn unfettered, and, this advantage gained, they held themselves just clear over the undulating grass towards Knossington, keeping their field struggling hard to live with them. Scrambling into the road before reaching the village, they bore up the steep slope to the right, and allowed the moment's breathing time that enabled many a good nag to live to the end who otherwise must have kneed a binder or dropped into a ditch in another five minutes. On again round the farmhouse on the hill, Mr. Tailby, on his white horse, gliding over a wide and hidden oxer with an ease that led a dozen followers, some to grief—all into a belief that nothing lay beyond. But, let the fence be what it may in other places, there were twenty men all flying it abreast, and boring the next thick black bullfinch like a sieve. Hounds are generally hindered by fences more than horses ; but so quick were they through the old thorn hedges that it was all that men could do to keep an eye on them. Timber offered the cleanest jumping, and timber was fortunately plentiful enough for the rush upon it ; but as horses began to catch their wind the farmers suffered in proportion, and a harvest of work was left behind for village carpenters. To say what happened in such a run is next door to an impossibility. One eye to watch the hounds and cut off every available yard of ground : one eye to hit off the likeliest spot without dwelling or interfering with your neighbours ; and

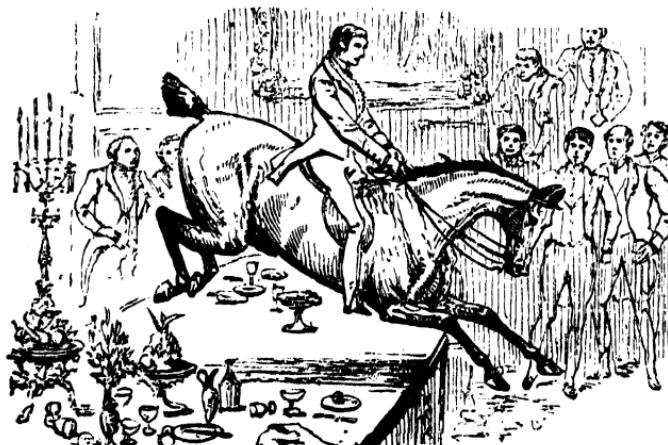
every nerve and sinew strained to carry a blown horse along, and pull him together for each effort—what faculties remain for observing what is going on on either side? Mr. Tailby, jumping more fences and bigger ones than any other man, and the white horse fresh when others were done to a turn, was looking to the hounds while the fast work was going on, with Goodall lying as handy as his late accident would allow him; Mr. Powell and Capt. Coventry searching out post-and-rails that would stop any ordinary field like a wire fence; Capt. Smith to-day on something that could do him justice: Mr. Robertson and Custance to show how little horses can go under light weights; Mr. Pennington, Mr. Tryon, Capt. Boyce, Messrs. Fludyer, Lord Hopetoun, Mr. Reynardson, Mr. Cochrane, Messrs. Murietta, Mr. St. John, Mr. Finch, Capt. Molyneux, Mr. Blackwood, &c. These occur to me as I write, and I have put them down as they come to mind at the moment; but they seem to represent but a tithe of the number who were going so straight and well. Some half-dozen, though, whose coat-tails one is accustomed to see flapping in front on such occasions, and who for their own pleasure and the sake of the rival cities that boast them should have been there, were now taking no part in the mêlée. Lord Grey de Wilton was unfortunately laid up with a sprained thigh, Sir Frederick Johnstone has not yet arrived, while Capt. Riddell and Mr. William Chaplin happened to be away; so Melton lost four of her doughtiest champions. Harborough, again, sent forth neither of the Messrs. Gosling nor Mr. Corbett Holland; the elder Mr. Gosling being a sufferer from a thorn in the eye.

To return to the run itself. After passing round Knossington they crossed the Oakham road, then over the high ridge leading from Cold Overton to Knossington with undiminished pace. Dipping into the low ground, they came to yet another road (leading from Cold Overton to Somerby); the drop into the lane was over the blindest of doubles, and noisy scrambles and loud ejaculations smote the ear. A mile further, they

turned again into the road scarcely a minute behind their fox, and took his line along it, right into the garden of Somerby House. Through this he was yelled at by foot-people and yapped at by a shepherd's dog ; but, instead of proving his destruction, it brought him safety for a time, for the hounds got their heads up, and he was able to slip away along the gulley towards Pickwell. Slowly they hunted on over the high ground to the left, rounded the frowning brow of Burrough Hill, and tracked their beaten fox up one hedgerow and down another on to the Melton Steeplechase course—where they came to their first check at the end of an hour and twenty minutes from first finding ! Of a holloa back and a holloa forward the wrong one was chosen ; the hounds were lifted a couple of fields on to a fresh fox, and followed him slowly into the Quorn country as far as Thorpe Trussells. Meanwhile, the hunted fox was viewed back towards the Punchbowl, there to await a fate that he had apparently and deservedly escaped. The Punchbowl being the only covert within reach for an afternoon draw, the hounds were brought on there for a second fox, and found our gallant friend just stiffening in fancied repose after his struggles of the morning. But he had some good stout stuff in him still, and a heart that knew no sinking. Even now he disdained to die in covert like a fatted Frenchman, but set his head once more for his woodland fastnesses, and battled bravely to cross the open ground and reach them. For some forty minutes over the open he had laughed at a burning scent and a racing pace in the morning, and, leg weary and sore in the evening, he could yet bid them fifteen minutes' defiance. Straight as an arrow he took them to Owston village, the party in his rear being the whole *élite* of the morning, and even they having all their work cut out to live the pace. One field on the right of Owston village, and within half a mile of his shelter, strength suddenly failed him. He stopped short, and the hounds were half a field over him in their eagerness ; but his time was come, and a few minutes more saw this grand, good fox pulled down stiff and helpless

from a hedgerow close below the wood. That he could go through half he did proclaims him extraordinary; and men who were fortunate enough to reap the full benefit of his deeds on that day will be long ere they forget him. There were good things, too, and many of them, done by horses, by hounds, and by men, that are well worthy to be handed down; but the achievement that deserves record more than all was the style in which, when the fences were biggest and the going fastest, Mr. Tryon, of Loddington, ever kept some sixteen or seventeen stone in the foremost rank.

COLONEL EDWARD CHAPLIN'S RUN IN A FOG.



MARQUIS OF WATERFORD RIDING OVER THE DINNER-TABLE AT
LOWESBY HALL.

LOWESBY HALL was the rendezvous and centre of supply, for commissariat as well as recruits, on December 28th—Sir Fred. Fowke providing hospitality on the table once ridden over by the famous Marquis of Waterford. John o' Gaunt was next made the base of operations. One fox stole away unper-

ceived before the hounds were in the covert; but a second kept himself quiet till the master began to look anxious about a find. But, once on foot, he delicately declined to cross-examine the ex-Craven hounds,* as to their capabilities in covert, and broke away for Tilton. He avoided the dreaded Marfield bottom just long enough to inveigle everybody out of reach of the bridge, then crossed it where it could not be jumped, and made for Mr. Tailby's woodlands (where soon "The Barleythorpe" will be holding their jaunts and jollities). Nobody was with the hounds for some fields; and the first to them were the earliest driblets through a narrow gap in a bullfinch which mercilessly pent up the huge impatient crowd. The crush was rendered still more horrible by the behaviour of an evil-dispositioned grey, which fought its way through all earlier comers by rising on its hind legs and striking out with a quickness worthy of Jimmy Shaw. On emerging through the hole in the order in which chance—or, better still, a kicker—enabled one to squeeze (N.B. On these occasions, if you have not a kicker, it is perhaps advisable to stretch out your hand behind, as such a course may often secure you more room), there were two of the most choking ploughs—through and up which to struggle—that were ever turned over by steam. The morning was misty and warm, the drops hung on every twig, and the hacks were in a lather before they reached the meet. But the fog that had hung over Skeffington all morning was now blown northwards, and covered the Tilton Hills like a blanket. Horses could scarcely gasp in it after wading through the deep loam; by the time the top of the hill was reached one and all were as distressed as if they had done a four-mile steeplechase, and each man felt serious alarm about the wind of his steed, till he found that his neighbour's was in a similar plight. Just before reaching the woods, hounds threw up for a minute or two, and allowed the huntsmen and the few who had found their way through

* Mr. Coupland's new pack.

the fog to get to them ; the rest of the field groping their way up while the chase was being carried on in Skeffington Woods. The fifteen minutes up to here was fast, but nobody saw it properly ; and the scrambling start from John o' Gaunt was simply lamentable in its disorder and disappointment.

From this point the thread of narrative unwinds and divides itself for a time, the two fibres reuniting and finally leading to a common end ; in plain English, the pack split in half, each part worked on its own line, at length they rejoined each other, and the common end was an untimely one for bold Reynard. The story is not an easy one to tell ; and indeed, it was not for some time afterwards that matters could be properly understood.

The woods were full of foxes, and they pushed one through the labyrinthine depths of Skeffington and Tilton, round and back again, out between the two after a lapse of time, and away along the Tilton and Tugby bridle road in the valley. Scent was indifferent, and the fox of a vacillating turn of mind. Anxious to go away, he had not the heart to make a point, and hung within hail of his native fastnesses, twisting to the left below the woodlands.

Meanwhile the other section of the pack had stuck persistently to their old love : gave him not a moment's peace in covert ; till, finding their attentions rather too marked to be pleasant, he took advantage of the field having moved round the wood to the other cry, and essayed to return from whence he came. But this time the villagers of Tilton were fully on the *qui vive*, had turned out in a body, and were formed round the village like a body of francs-tireurs defending their hearths. Consequently our furry friend (the adjective being thrown in merely as a compliment, for his brush was as short of hair as a soldier is of ready money) found the way blocked, and was forced to alter his tactics. The eight or nine couple of hounds which got away on his track, without master or huntsmen, were fortunate enough to pick up an M.F.H. on their road. Col. Edward Chaplin had taken advantage of a non-hunting day

with the Blankney to rail down for a look at the Quorn ; had arrived rather late at covert ; had been trotting leisurely about in the dense fog, wondering if we are accustomed to look upon daylight as necessary for hunting in Leicestershire ; and, now that the atmosphere had cleared a little, was endeavouring to make use of the no less hazy directions of the natives to enable him to reach the hounds. To a stranger the dialect of the local clodhopper is probably as useful as Low Dutch ; but there is no mistaking the aboriginal when he sees a fox. If he can do nothing else, he can sound a *view holloa*—by inborn and hereditary talent rather than tuition—and is never so frantically happy as when he gets the chance. On this occasion there were fifty pair of lungs, each of which could almost out-scream a steam-engine ; and, to endorse their noisy announcement, the sweet familiar music of deep ringing throats came floating up the vale. “Sixteen, or even twenty couples, we don’t consider too many in Lincolnshire ; but perhaps the grass doesn’t want such a lot as our deep clay. What, nobody with them ! Well, I suppose the huntsman and the field will be up directly ; and anyhow, it won’t do to stop them when they are running like this. Forrard, you beauties ! Not so even-coloured as ours perhaps, but they can tackle to their work for all that.”

The howling crowd had turned him down the hill, and, baffled in his first intentions, he now sped away at right angles, and then threatened to circle back into the woodlands. Perhaps he looked back over his shoulders, and disdained to show the white feather to a single pit of pink, a rough rider, and half-a-dozen second-horsemen ; for he turned away again into the open, and struck away hap-hazard as if to pass between the villages of Skeffington and Billesdon. Over the high ground hounds carried it well, and steadily they took it on till two deep fallows puzzled them for a time. Oddly enough, though the foot-people are said to have yelled till the hunt was out of sight, though the melody of the hounds themselves must have been carried far away in the still air, it was not even discovered that

there were hounds missing from the other line of covert, which was engaging the attention of Macbride and his field. To steal away with two or three couple of hounds from a covert would no doubt be reprehensible in the extreme, as no sport could result, and the efforts of the main body might be interfered with ; but when it was a matter of eight couple and a half sticking to the run fox, and going well, it would have been unnatural, even if politic, to attempt to stop them.

The difficulty of the fallows was got over by a holloa in the Tilton and Billesdon road just beyond. In front was a wild hilly country, but the best of sound turf and the cleanest of fences, the latter made rather for keeping cattle in, than for accommodating a solitary sportsman new to their expansive nature. But the stranger was equal to the occasion, and no doubt enjoyed himself amazingly, with his little pack again well together and streaming along fast enough to test the goodness of his Melton mount. The unmistakable landmark of the Coplow was beckoning them on, and, dipping into a low and thickly fenced valley, they followed its course almost to the foot of the hill. But two men in the road had prevented the fox trespassing on the expected afternoon draw ; he had turned into the little spinneys bordering the hill, and there lay down for a minute or so. He started off again when he found his pursuers close at him ; but, instead of this helping them, they puzzled for some five minutes over the twisted and foiled line, and had just hit it off when Macbride suddenly galloped up with the rest of the pack to their assistance.

It seems that the fox that we had been following in full state and in all due solemnity, under the idea that he was the original find of John o' Gaunt, was an impostor from a foreign country ; but, by a singular coincidence, he had broken nearly on the same line as the true Roger, and had struck into his track somewhere about the two ploughed fields of which we have spoken. From this point, Macbride's division (he thought the whip was bringing on the remainder) had merely hunted up to their predecessors, mystifying their huntsman by the slack, careless

style in which they kept pushing forwards, till the enigma was solved by their running into their precursive sisters above Billesdon Coplow.

With a beaten fox close ahead, it was long odds that the combined force would be able to finish the work so effectually carried on by half the corps; but it took some time yet to do it. The scent was now never much higher than their toes, and, though they never let it slip away from them, they had to stoop to hold it—and to conquer. The rough wild country and the want of pace were galling in the extreme to the *hard* element, who were there in abundance from every quarter; but for those who were content to witness true painstaking hunting there was continual pleasure, and a satisfactory finish. No hounds in the world could have worked more perseveringly and well than did the new Quorn pack.

They hunted on without check or hindrance past Lord Moreton's stables at Cold Newton, and reached John o' Gaunt again in an hour and twenty minutes from the moment when "Forward away!" was sounded from its side. Twenty minutes more took them through and beyond into a trail of plough: ten minutes pretty quick on the grass took the last strength out of their game; and five minutes more brought him out of the plantation above Lowesby stiff and stark. A hunting run of an hour and fifty-five minutes, without losing the line for five minutes, and with a proper wind up at the end, is something out of the common. Many of those who were out will say, "Thank Heaven it is!" but they did not see Col. Chaplin's three-quarters of an hour, or they might speak differently. That it was the same fox was proved by those who saw him carry his scantily-clad stern away from the covert, and who assisted at his obsequies afterwards. Peace to his ashes! Like the Roehoe fox of last year, he showed that raiment has little to do with vulpine pluck and endurance.

A BURST IN THE SUNSHINE FROM SCRAPTOFT GORSE.

SCRAPTOFT GORSE gave just such another sharp, delightful scurry as it did last year, ending just as prematurely. There was little or no excitement about the find ; in fact, the fox found himself, and lost no time in breaking covert in front of the crowd who were penned up in the narrow lane. The hounds sprang out instantly to the master's horn, and were away on his line before half the band of hard men had extricated themselves. An unfortunate veteran was dismounted right in the gangway, and, amid the struggling sea of horsemen, was tossed about hither and thither till he got separated from his horse, and for very existence was straining every nerve to regain his lifebuoy. No one stopped to help the man overboard, but some apparently rather reviled him for hindering their passage. Once clear of the gateway there was a choice between keeping on the grass a little wide to the left, or floundering through the single fallow on the track of the pack. The former was doubtless the proper course, but at such moments it is necessary to decide promptly, and a prompt decision is too often a wrong one. Still, to hesitate at a start is to lose a run, so a trot over the plough is the determination, and the pack make headway at twice the pace you can afford to. What an effort of patience it requires to go slow through the deep dirt ! but once on the turf again, you may conscientiously drive the prickers in, and catch hold of his head. The fox, like all Scraptoft foxes, knew not his own mind on leaving his doorstep ; for, after heading at first direct for Keyham, he swung away at right angles. There could not fail to be a scent to-day—the air was clear and still as in a frost—and the hounds raced away at Liverpool speed. But the sun was bright and dazzling—some of the best of horses seemed completely stupefied by it—and the similarity to the little spin of last year was further increased by the pantomimic tumbling of the front rank. What tales we who were behind could tell—of how two acknowledged chieftains

quietly sat down in a ditch, and blocked up the only negotiable holes in a blackthorn screen ; of how treacherous rabbits let in one of the boldest of the southerners, and entrapped many smaller fry as they crossed a fair delusive pasture ; and of how two guiding stars (one the high priest of the ceremonies) dropped earthwards when most prominent in their pilotage. But such little matters are always to be delicately and carefully alluded to. If a man is riding " his young one," he is possibly rather gratified by the solicitude that prompts you to ask if he is hurt ; if he is riding A FRIEND's horse, he is absolutely pleased, and takes the inquiry as an encomium on his thrusting powers ; but if he has been hapless enough to come under your notice when his " wouldn't-take-250-for-him " crock brings him to grief, and he is perhaps meditating a spring sale, he will positively hate you.

But under any circumstances men are coy about their misfortunes being paraded before the public, very properly considering that they stand on their heads for their own amusement, and not for other people's. Well, the line was marked by loose horses and topbooted pedestrians for about a mile parallel to the dreaded Keyham Bottom, till Messrs. Reynard and Coventry were almost simultaneously struck with the remembrance of the spot where Capts. Robertson and Fludyer made it practicable a twelvemonth since, hit it off exactly, and, with the pack as a connecting link, sailed away up the hill to the Keyham and Billesdon road. The boggy bottom did not stop Macbride, though it brought some scrambling and splashing to his immediate followers, and he was there to cheer the pack over as they crossed the road. Three fields down to another road (the Hungerton to Keyham), then two more fences, and the chase was over, as far as its bright, sparkling fun was concerned. But even this ten or twelve minutes, aided by the warm sunlight, were enough to cause shaking tails and foaming flanks, for the pace was so great there was not time for a pull at a fence. True, they hit it off again, and as they trotted along round Hungerton and Baggrave there was ample

time to see "how the great had fallen." Broken hats and dirty shoulders were unmistakable omens of work for the wonderful Melton hatter (who can restore a squashy pulp to a shiny go-to-meeting), and of less remunerative labour to the gentlemen of the bedchamber.

One thing at least was proved by the short-lived burst—viz., that the present Quorn hounds can race on a scent (and that too, without over-running it at a turn), for they slipped along through the fences at a pace that fairly cut their field to pieces. The fatal check occurred in the middle of a grass enclosure, and was so sudden and unaccountable that one could only attribute it to some supernatural agency—or a sheep dog.

If there were curious incidents during the fast part of the run, there was plenty to look at when the slow travelling began and the good citizens of Leicester took a more active part in the fray. Each fence was productive of something impromptu and original, and one performance in particular was charmingly ludicrous. A worthy cit had ventured a-hunting, and his steed was perforce obliged to follow his rôle and become a hunter forthwith. Strong blackthorn binders (even a foot high) are not often found on a turnpike road, so proved a novelty dangerous alike to man and horse. The latter found his onward career suddenly checked, and lit upon his arched and classic nose. The former rolled over and over before him, then suddenly sprang to his feet like a lamplighter, clapped both hands to his head, and, without casting a single glance behind, scuttled away down the field as if all Pandemonium were let loose at his heels, nor turned to look for his horse till he had put a clear fifty yards between them.

THE OLD EARL TAKES THE LEAD FROM HIS OWN COVERT.

ON Monday, January 12th, the Quorn had a run that was straight, quick, and satisfactory as any run could be. From Welby Fishpond their fox escaped to Cant's Thorns close by, with a rare scent, and hounds running hotly at his heels. A few nice fences under Wartnaby, and then he turned to the left to Saxelby Spinney, whence he crossed the hill and dropped into the vale. Leaving Old Dalby on his left, he made for Nether Broughton, under which place they bowled him over in the open : time, thirty-two minutes after breaking covert, forty from the find. Years of health and vigour to the Earl King ! He took a lead and kept it throughout, pace serving him and judgment telling. Mr. Coupland, Capt. Turner Farley, and Mr. Foster were quite first-rate in his wake. Several of the best and hardest goers of the hunt got off badly and never showed in front at all. Two or three ploughs after Saxelby Spinney were simply awful, and spread-eagled the field sadly ; though the new hounds were able to carry a head over them, and showed throughout that they can fly on a scent as well as they can hunt a line. The best and neatest run this season. Lord Wilton was delighted at its being from his own covert, and claimed the brush accordingly, which on other grounds he had fairly gained.

AFTER THE HARBOROUGH BALL.

THURSDAY, February 8th, was the day of the Market Harborough Hunt Ball. But it was not fated that there should be another Waterloo run for Capt. Thomson to read of in his rocky retreat in Devonshire ; nor even a gallop from Loatland Wood, with a plunge into the Rushton Brook, to call back remembrances to Capt. Tempest, when a month hence

The Field should relieve one hour of existence on the broiling plains of India. Strange, though true, both these good coverts refused to provide amusement for the multitude who had come from near and far to see them drawn ; and Sunderland Wood was the next stoppage named on the journey. But on the way thither Mr. Glover, of Harrington, came to the rescue, represented that for weeks past he had maintained a brace of foxes on his farm and poultry yard, and suggested the advisability of their ridding him of his vulpine Soapy Sponges. Accordingly the leading squadrons of the field were thrown into skirmishing order, and proceeded to scour stubble and fallow. Reynard and the missis were both on the premises ; but so thoroughly at home did they consider themselves in the annexed territory that they were loath to believe in the possibility of intrusion, and refused to notice it till almost whipped out of their seats. The ruder villain jumped up within a few yards of the hounds, and nearly sacrificed himself in drawing off their attention from his lady. Over the first field he had the greatest difficulty in keeping his black brush clear—with the leading hounds open-jawed for a snatch at it. A thickly-stacked rickyard gave him twenty yards more room, and at the second fence he earned a still further advantage, for he doubled quickly down the side of it, and the bristling pack shot half over the next field in their mad eagerness. They swing round again in a moment ; but that lost moment is never fairly retrieved. Straight for Loat-land Wood he is pointing—his dark dingy form still visible to the thrusting mob that would press the hounds if they could. By nose it is now, though there is a scent that a man could run, and they are straining to it as if he were still close in view. The fences are not to be taken in every place, and, strong as is the hard element to-day, the front division thins and lengthens out as it struggles in pursuit. At the meet to-day by no means were they all “dancing dervishes”—an epithet which one sorely-tried M. F. H. in the neighbourhood bestowed on the ball-going fraternity who favoured him and

rode over his hounds. The best of men and horses were there from head quarters, and good metal from every other quarter; and many choice spirits that can always go are doubly fired by the increased competition in promise, and are full of "ride" this day.

Alas that pluck and ardour should be so wasted!—that not even a stout fox, a rare scent, a good horse, and unfailing nerve should avail to give the Elysium that is contained in riding to a grand burst over a grass country! In the first happy moments of racing for a start the leaders forget the gulf that the Loatland Brook, now swollen over its treacherous banks, has placed across the rich vale between the woods of Loatland and Sunderland; and they are almost on the edge of the overflowing water before they realise its presence and impracticability. A frail riding bridge is not far off, and Mr. Langham is the first to remember and to get down to it—hounds moving away up the opposite slope in a style that can only be expressed by the hackneyed term *streaming*. A plank covers a huge breakage in the frail structure; the rider leads over with his whip thong; the wood is kicked into the water; and the horse scrambles over as by a miracle. But the way is now stopped completely; no one will risk the passage with a certain alternative between breaking his horse's legs or drowning him; and the crowd gallop off in opposite directions—some for the bridge at Arthingworth, others for that near Loatland Wood, while Mr. Langham is in little better plight; for by the time he has remounted the hounds are out of sight, and he in the position of a man riding in the dark. Before he can rise the hill the flying pack have such a start of him that henceforth he can only get an occasional glimpse of them some six fields ahead. The way round to either bridge seems endless, and the journey is made hideous by the sounds of wrath and disgust that issue from every lip. Up the road by Loatland Wood the crowd clatter and splash, urging madly on in hopes of cutting off the pack, whose merry voices sound fainter and fainter in the still air till the hill shuts them out

and they are heard no more. Three stray hounds are mixed up in, and carried along with, the living torrent. With the dash and courage for which the Pytchley ladies are so famous, they are racing through their horses to get to the front, when one galloper, more reckless than his comrades, rushes on to their backs, and the iron feet deal a deathblow to the best. Lay her on the turf bank and raise her head. Her tongue is black and her eyes are dull and thick. One wistful moaning cry she utters, and the good bitch is dead.

Meanwhile, what is happening on the other side? Not a hound stopped to shake herself as she issued from her chilly bath. Every tongue was going impatiently as they swam the stream, and shiny and dripping they glanced away at once. For two fields they were alone, and then they cut into the bridle road, between Arthingworth and Loatland Wood, which runs parallel with the brook, and along which the field had passed on their way to the stubbles where they found. Thus some half-dozen of the rear-guard, under the impression that Sunderland Wood was about to be drawn, and respectful of Mr. Cave Humphrey's knowledge of the country, had followed his lead to go round by the village of Arthingworth, and so had never crossed the fatal brook. The alarm of fire on board ship spreads no quicker than do the words "They've found!" among the crowd of the hunting field. The cunning idlers saw at once they had outwitted themselves, made up their minds that their sport was lost, but galloped back along the bridle road to watch the panorama across the valley. They saw the field quickly scatter and expand as the hounds flitted down the slope to the water; and they marked the baffled leaders, checked suddenly by the flood, roaming up and down its banks for the possibility of a fly. The hounds are hid from their sight for some moments, and they canter on for Loatland Wood, when suddenly the pack dash across them not a hundred yards in front, and they find themselves in a position that their dilatory carelessness ill deserves. They must ride now if they are men; and to do their duty now may make

some slight amends for their past error. A blast of the horn reaches them as they awake to the situation. It may be meant for the recall or for a farewell blessing. There are only two of them to accept the honour thrust upon them—Mr. Paulet, of Theddingworth and another. Weight for age they are riding; and the big, powerful horse of the former crashes easily through a close-grown bullfinch that nearly wrenches the lighter man from his five-year-old. Side by side they settle down to keep within distance of the flying pack, with whom they can just grapple when the ridges of the old grass pastures give them firm galloping ground, but who fairly head them when they cross the soppy furrows. The fox has turned away from Loatland Wood, and Waterloo is now his point; every jump requires more covering, and every fence has fewer vulnerable points to catch the eye; while with a swift, ceaseless prattling like that of running water, hounds are sweeping across the Oxendon Lordship with a head almost an acre broad.

Within two fields of Waterloo, a hedge-cutter brandishes his tomahawk in the face of the gallant fugitive, and turns him away towards Oxendon village. Shepherds and nondescripts there are on every hill, and every quarter of a mile brings a holloa over the vale; but the hounds will notice nothing but what they can tell for themselves, and drive at their fox till it seems as if each minute must be his last. And what grand good heart and pluck he must possess to stand before them thus! He is going, after twenty minutes, as though he were just starting with half a mile's law. They have never hesitated, and they have never dwelt; but he has gained ground rather than lost it, and neither of the fortunate ones will handle his brush yet. Pull her together, and let the spurs make her forget she is blown! One chestnut pitches on to her head at that corner, while the other takes half a minute to get his hind legs after him out of the broad chasm that yawned for him. Greasy as bacon is the approach to the hog-backed stile under Oxendon Windmill; but the fence is impracticable elsewhere.

Both get over without a touch, and henceforth it is downhill and lighter travelling. Turning sharp away from the railway, they keep it on their right, by the Oxendon railway crossing, exchanging signals as they pass with a man who had viewed him down. "How long has he gone?" is the question from one party. "Why, where's all the red 'uns?" the counter query from the other. Then over two (the only) pieces of plough by the side of the line, till they cross over into Kelmarsh Spinney, after thirty-two minutes without one tardy moment to mar it. Their fox had trotted in just before them, lay down in the underwood, they got beyond him, and a ten minutes' check ensued. Goddard, the second whip, was the first to appear on the scene; Capt. Clarke came next; Mr. Langham immediately afterwards; the main body by degrees; and Roake set the ball rolling again as soon as he came up, by carrying the hounds beyond the covert, and hitting off the line where their game had stolen out. Foot-people viewed him again at once, and the field themselves saw him enter Sunderland Wood after his long circuit. In the wood the scent was feeble, and he was able to struggle out unseen, and gain Blue Covert before they could lay hands upon him, though forced to rest two or three times by the way, and start again in view. Three or four fresh foxes in the covert took turn about to divert the attention of the pack from their persecuted brother, and, though after an hour's perseverance the pack were all round him in a corner, and, scent or no scent, were bent upon his destruction, the field grew impatient, and Roake was ordered to take his hounds out upon the line of one who had broken away. And thus did as stout and swift a fox as ever trod turf escape his fate after a two hours' trial; but, much as he deserved his life, did not the hounds deserve their prey still more?

A ROUGH AND TUMBLE FROM THRUSSINGTON NEW COVERT.

FOR a sample we need go no further than Monday, February 19th, with the Quorn, though each and every other day had its good features, and has been in unison with the continuous flow of good sport we are now enjoying. A better season than the present has not been seen since '61, when Leicestershire was as much beswamped with rain and as prolific of gallant runs as now. The grooms alone look melancholy over the present state of things, for the deep, deep ground is cutting their stables to pieces, and the question "What for to-morrow?" becomes nightly more difficult to answer. Even at Melton, in many instances, men are beginning to find it is not so much a case of what sport they may look for, but of whether they can get out at all.

Monday comes after a day of rest for man and beast, so the beast was universally forthcoming, and no man would deny himself Six Hills with the Quorn if he could help it. A bright sun in the early morning and a rising glass put weather considerations out of sight till it was time to start for covert, and misplaced confidence brought suffering to follow in its path as usual. An hour of pouring rain brought gloom to many a smiling face, and ruin to many a faultless toilette; but the storm passed off as suddenly as it came, and the faces, if not the toilettes, shone forth again like primroses. Mr. Musters had given his merry men of Nottingham a holiday, in consideration of their toil in his marvellous run of the previous Friday, when the lightest and the hardest of them had striven in vain to see the Squire scream over his fox at the end of *six-and-thirty miles*; and now he had placed himself at their head to show them scenes of his former glory. As is usual at Six Hills, the field was formed on the *vires acquirit eundo* or rolling-snowball principle. The captain of the forces and his staff moved off the hounds almost unattended to Cossington Gorse,

and the rank and file of the column joined in on the road. It always takes a convenient time to rout a fox out of the Cossington thickets ; and he can seldom be made to budge till he has given full opportunity for morning greetings and Monday news. When he did go to-day, there is little to tell beyond that he chose the dirty side of the road instead of the sweet grass, put a feather in the cap and a happy dream into the mind of a newly-arrived Meltonian—who enjoyed three fields of plough to the exclusion of his less enterprising *confrères*—soon tired of the ignoble mire, and crossed over the highway into the Thrussington country. Here they meandered slowly about for half-an-hour, with a lack of scent and incident, save and except the total dissipation of a treble oxer, to which the very dulness of the proceedings impelled a gallant *militaire* ; then gave up the search, and fell back upon Thrussington New Covert.

They were some minutes in finding, but not half a minute in driving out their fox before them ; for the field had scarcely a notion that there was game afoot ere the pack came dashing out in noisy haste close at his brush. The ravine two fields from the covert gave him a better start, and stopped the stream of horsemen for a moment. Once over this, the line was seized as vigorously as ever. Every man who has hunted with the Quorn knows the Thrussington and Hoby pastures, and may be able to recall the delight of going fast over them ; sound good turf, and sound strong fences, each enclosure like the one before it, and each minute happier than the last as hounds keep flying on. Mr. Simpkin, of Hoby, chanced to be looking round his farm, when the same fortuitous accident that invariably throws a sporting doctor's patients in the direction of the hounds brought the hunt across him. There is no need of his holding up his hat ; the hounds are flinging along the line like racehorses, and clatter past him with a rush that makes the four-year-old as enthusiastic as the rider, who has hunted for five-and-thirty years. No thought of youth or age now ! The young one is sent along, with his hind legs under

him, in a style that will make him a hunter before he is twenty minutes older. For some fields the pair lead the van, till the junior lacks confidence at a hairy place, and the senior finds he has no spurs to instil it into him. Mr. Cheney then takes his place, and spurts up the ridge-and-furrow beyond, with a goodly band in close attendance. The Hoby and Ragdale road plays havoc among the leaders; the pace has been severe, the country trying, and the jump into the lane is a trappy one.

Whose steed is flying down the road,
Delighted to have shirked his load ?
No funker's is he, or impostor ;
Why chanced it, then, such luck to Foster ?

Young in name, but not in years,
See, there is one who knows no fears,
Now pulling at his horse's ears ;
“How get him out ?” he cries in tears.

But Col. Burnaby's fall was a more serious matter, for he was a good deal crushed by his horse, and had some difficulty in riding home.

The hounds now dip down into the valley beyond the road, and people who ride for points have already fixed their mind's eye on Shoby Scholes, remembering the Prince of Wales's burst last year. But, though the fox treats them to the first two or three raspers on the route, he turns not for the covert, but holds towards Asfordby, with no apparent point in front. The Wreake is swollen a quarter of a mile broad on his right, so he is not likely to turn in that direction—though several gentlemen are said to have brought out their swimming belts in case of accident. “Keep to your right !” roars the first man over an oxer. But the warning comes too late ; the second is already in the air, and, with a less manageable horse than his predecessor's, is carried into a deep and dirty runlet that crosses the field. On to higher ground where runs the Hoby and Shoby bridle road, the line hunters riding deep in the plough over the two last fields, the skirters taking full advantage of the grass on the left ; and just as the two parties join

a sudden stoppage over an open burrow proclaims that five-and-twenty minutes is all there will be. Right good it was from beginning to end, and it is no undeserved compliment to say that one of its chief features was to see Lord Wilton riding forward throughout, with his arm in a sling.

A WET AFTERNOON SCRAMBLE.

Two o'clock saw an almost general dispersion at Grimstone Gorse, which, as it turned out, meant losing the run of the day. Let me tell it briefly. With a cloud overhead and a cloud on his brow at the falling off of his followers, the master faced the pelting rain, and struck out a route for Ellars' Gorse. Splashing slowly along, with up-turned collar and down-turned gaze, he began to think his Monday was a doomed day, like the previous Friday. Hounds were drearily jogging along, all ears and back, at the huntsman's heels ; the whips had ceased their "Get on, get o-on;" and Macbride had crouched almost under his saddle bow. A pelting sleet and a screeching wind struck derisively into the chieftain's ear, and bade him loudly to leave good coverts for another day. There were but eight followers to turn their backs to the wind at Ellars' Gorse. Seven of these begged for Willoughby as a reward for their long suffering ; while the eighth turned tail and plunged into the forest, to be seen and see no more. Three o'clock at Willoughby Gorse, and only two red coats besides Mr. Coupland and his aides to maintain the panoply of war. Capt. King, who sees more sport on a few horses than any man in the Hunt, was there to view the game played out, to spin a yarn of home-grown hemp, and to make mental notes to guide his pencil when a dislocated thumb should take it up again. The Vale of Belvoir had three representatives—one in pink and water, one in a cap that acted like a slanting roof to shoot off the rain, and one on

a high-class thoroughbred. Nottingham law and Nottingham sport had likewise a delegate; while the Quorn Hunt could only furnish two or three coats of monkish hue to complete the scanty attendance.

Willoughby Gorse this year is a certainty. The present Quorn pack seemed to know this by instinct, for they spread themselves in covert like Clumbers, and straightway shook the moisture off the thorns from end to end. Two foxes on the move immediately; one crosses over the ride, and the other breaks away back in view of the least musical of the eight shivering sportsmen. He trusts to his hat rather than his throat, waves it round his head with double windmill vigour, and at length succeeds in getting Mr. Sandy's lungs and the master's horn under way. Macbride is busy up wind with the varmint in covert, but soon catches the cue, and with pack and bugle flies quickly to the rescue. Over the road towards Ellars' Gorse, every hound in his place, and every hound laughing noisily at the weather. With a sparkle and freshness that spreads itself to their followers, they dash over the grass for half a dozen fields with a clear start, then turn to the right, and the latter get on even terms again as they bear up for Wimeswold. A tenant, courteous but cunning, puts five-eighths of the riders aside from his wheat, and wide of the hounds, by bidding them vociferously to go for an imaginary gap into the meadow on the right, and they have to push and pump to recover their ground. For a quarter of an hour they are pegging along, alternately choosing the highest ridges and the wettest furrows, and for ten minutes more they are wading girth-deep among the wheat growth. Sorry for you, sir, that gate's locked, and you have to knee the stile. Macbride has both spurs driving home, and clears it at a bound; but at the one beyond is momentarily swaying on it, like the toy horseman with the leaden balance that gave us our first notion of proportionate equilibrium. Cortlingstock Village is just in front, and unfortunately its sporting proclivities were roused into life last week by Mr. Musters's foray over the country.

The villagers have scented fox, and Reynard has scented them, and turned short back from his point for Bunney Park. A single hound rings his conviction loudly on the back line, and supplies the want of a holloa, as the double throws them on to their haunches. A cast back sets them busy again—but finally a draggled, beaten fox crept into Stanford Hall Woods and denied a finish to a run that would have made a field till five o'clock for the rest of the season.

WET LEICESTERSHIRE.

WHAT is the one chief idea that we have been accustomed to associate with a grass country, and more especially with the honoured name of Leicestershire, ever since we learnt to hunt, or even to talk of hunting? In what have we been taught to consider lies its first charm, and what does experience tell us is its ruling delight? Is it not its springy turf and firm elastic footing; the power of skimming lightly over the surface, and bounding gaily over its fences—heeding neither pace nor would-be obstacle, but revelling in their presence, and trusting to blood and courage to make light of them? Is it not the dream of such a happiness that makes provincial youth to groan, rebel against the toils that hold him, and to hate his native soil? Is it not the remembrance of such that will bring a flush to the withered cheek and a sparkle to the dimming eye of the Nestor, as he tells how he flew the raspers side by side with the old Squire, and held his horse as the other brushed a fox that had thought himself invincible? Is it not for this that men lavish time and money, and think no sacrifice too great so long as they can be in the sphere to indulge in their all-absorbing pursuit?

But when High Leicestershire becomes a morass; when, instead of gliding lightly over ridge and furrow, pulling hard

to see hounds go their best, and flying easily from one pasture into the next, you can only struggle and wade through green swamps, and scramble wearily over the weakest gaps ; when your best horse gasps and sobs at the end of five minutes, and labours painfully to carry his hind legs over a mere gap ; and when hounds fairly leave their field to follow by distant glimpses—then are the glorious bursts, of almost every-day occurrence, robbed of half their charm, and men confess to a loss of much of the keen relish that such runs are wont to bring. To see each moment of a good scent putting you at a worse advantage ; to have to drive a generous animal along when all his elasticity is gone, and he can no longer lance boldly over his fences, or stride strongly over the ground, is a work of sorrow, not of pleasure, and damps enthusiasm as quickly as it is roused. The Romney Marshes and the Lincolnshire Fens, in all their pristine unculture, could scarcely have been more unrideable than are our boasted pastures at the present time. More particularly was full and sorrowful evidence of this forthcoming on Saturday last (March 2nd), the red-letter day of the past week, when Mr. Tailby gathered another laurel from the ground he has so shortly to relinquish.

Ranksborough that afternoon seemed a very long way after the return for another search of the Punch Bowl ; and the fine country through which the journey lay appeared desperately deep and soppy.

Ne'er tell me of glories serenely adorning
The close of our day, the calm eve of our night.
Give me back, give me back the wild freshness of morning ;
Her clouds and her tears are worth evening's best light.

Moreover, “evening's best light” gave every promise of a week's frost ; the air was cold and raw, and the grass crisp as a lettuce. But there must be an end of everything ; and those who reached the end first were in time to view a white-tipped brush away almost as soon as the hounds were in. He ran the long narrow belt of trees all the way up to Orton Park

Wood, the pace tremendous, and the narrowness of the hand-gates forcing all who wanted to be within hail to flounder over the awkward timber and wondrously-built fences at their sides. But the wood was not his point after all ; and he turned away within a field of it, and led them such a dance along the high ridge overlooking Oakham that he succeeded in fairly bursting every horse. For three or four and twenty minutes the pack cracked along with a thorough mastery of their field ; and the farther they went, the more completely did they settle the question of hounds *versus* horses through dirt. Never was a line of gates so welcome as now ; for horses were soon so beaten that they could scarcely raise a jump at all, and for about the first time in memory a run was complained of as being “*too fast*.” Through Oakham Pasture they flew down to the lower ground—though wading would more nearly express the mode of progression of wearied steeds as they reached it. A momentary slip over the scent, and a chorus of holloas on to an outlying stranger, lost them their fox—who went on past Oakham, and was actually seen by Jack West to try the kennel doors of the Cottesmore at Barleythorpe. Three or four hounds would have followed to immolate him on the threshold of the temple he had sought, but were unfortunately whipped off to what was supposed to be the right line, and this wonderfully good game fox got clear off before they returned to try and mark him down. Wonderfully good and game we may call him, for he trusted only to his powers of speed and endurance for his safety, never stopped nor doubled, and for those four-and-twenty minutes he had Mr. Tailby’s brilliant lady-pack coursing him as if in view. Horses stopped dead beat in every field ; tails were uplifted and shaking, heads were drooping and nodding, flanks were bleeding and quivering, white horses had turned black, and black horses had turned white ; while riders were flushed and dripping, and double-breasted coats had become insufferable. The steed of a noble Hon. Sec., already burdened heavily with the responsibilities of office, was now so overcome by present exhaustion

and the vision of prospective labours that, after groaning deeply three times, he completely gave in, and, curling himself up, lay quietly down to sleep and rest. Of course there were many to claim that they had been with hounds throughout; but the most forward and the most candid chanced to see none between them and the pack, with whom, even with the help of easy-swinging gates, they could never hold their own. To conclude, it is only necessary to say that a long time was taken up in trying in vain to find what stragglers had met any one of the three foxes afoot, and longer still to find out if any of them knew a fresh fox from a beaten one. In the end the original object was vainly sought; and weary nags were enabled to reach their stalls at a comparatively early hour, to drink their gruel to the memory of as severe a day as even this trying season has produced.

A JUVENILE MATCH.

ON Tuesday March 5th a special from Melton conveyed the whole of the metropolitan rank and beauty to the scene of the Grand Military at Rugby. The Gold Cup was of course an attraction, but by no means the chief one, for in the impromptu Juvenile Plate centred all interest. Capt. Boyce's *Smoke*, 19 years (owner), and Capt. Park Yates's *Havelock*, 20 years (Capt. Riddell), were the only two that came to the post—opinions being divided as to which of the pair the delicate confession of age applied to. *Smoke* was looking as gay as when he ran for the credit of the 16th many years ago, and now won easily—the wealth of Melton being considerably added to thereby. The old horses jumped everything faultlessly in true hunter's form, and, if the finish was not a very close one, at all events, as an Irish coachman expressed it, “they brought one another along respectable-like.” Two days of summer weather brought not only all the county

and all the military, but turned the course into a little Ascot—

Damsels in divers colours, like the cloud
Of sunshine and of sunrise ; and some of them
On horseback.

The Tailbyites on the same day preferred their woodland seclusion to the less orthodox sport at Rugby ; and while the rest of the world were cutting into pigeon pie, they were amusing themselves on a slice of the Quorn country round John o' Gaunt.

On Wednesday the Pytchley passed with contemptuous air down the road bordering the steeplechase course ; but by four o'clock their pride had gradually fallen to a very low level, under the influence of a succession of blank draws.

MR. TAILBY'S FINAL SUCCESS IN HIS OWN COUNTRY.

MR. TAILBY has again all the credit of the past week, and of him once more must be the burden of my song. Surely, if ever Fortune lavished her favours (not undeservedly) on a master of hounds, she has done so this year with Mr. Tailby, treating him with an overflowing affection that has never waned or faltered. Byron might have been prophesying the season '71-72 of the Billesdon Hunt when he broke out with his somewhat misty panegyric :

O shadow of glory,
Dim image of war !
But the chase hath a glory,
Her hero a star.

MARCH 26TH.

A thorough hunting afternoon, albeit the chilly wind had a westerly point, took almost every soul on to Orton Park Wood ; and if everyone did not reap the enjoyment in store, the fault was their own, or that of accident. After months of bullying

and unrest, foxes seldom dwell in the woodlands to hear more than one note, or to be greeted with more than one cheer. Indeed, at no time is it safe to be dallying or coffee-housing when Mr. Tailby's pack are at work in these sylvan depths. Outsiders and time-servers are generally left behind, and why? Because they trust to chance rather than to themselves for a start. The master and his regular disciples, on the contrary—such as Messrs. Gosling, Robertson, Pennington, Powell, &c.—are seldom if ever left in the lurch, for the simple reason that they help themselves, never get out of hearing of the hounds, and make up their minds to brave the muddy quagmires of the rides, knowing well that the wind and labour expended in getting off on good terms may almost invariably be recovered when hounds face the open. It matters not to them that they issue smeared and blinded with slush, when they receive complacently the envious looks of their cleaner comrades at the end of forty minutes, in which a stern chase has meant a hopeless one. On this occasion a wideawake fox slipped off the instant he could catch the up-wind notice, and broke at the top as soon as a hound had opened on the lair he had left. There was just time to get round to the holloa as the pack came bustling out with the determined vivacity of their sex, each hound hurrying to the front and hating to be behind her fellows. Over half a dozen fields into Lady Wood, and on in the face of the wind into Owston Wood, was only the work of ten minutes, the pack racing clear ahead, and no time for opening a gate on the way. Too intimate knowledge of country robs many a man of a good ride here, when he remembers the big covert in front; but the Tailbyites know the scenting properties of the two-mile track, and always steeple-chase over its big flying fences and rough old grass, as if each man carried a fresh horse in his pocket. A plunge into Owston Wood, moreover, is too often a preface to a yet deeper dip into woodlands beyond, so they eagerly make use of the present; but to-day hounds carried the line through without dwelling a moment, their field spreading some above and some

below, while others left the security of the outside for the more laborious intricacies of the paths within. The latter could never contend against the pace, and reached the end only to find Owston Village and half a mile of grass between themselves and the flying pack.

Short cuts are generally a delusion, but that delusion must be risked now if places are to be recovered. Two rasping four-rail stiles, with a stray puppy persistently slipping in just at the critical moment of taking off; then a clean light oxer, an easy-swinging gate, and the village is past. Owston Bottom has its terrors; but someone has carried away the top rail at the only spot where it is possible to make a double off the bank. The lower rail is just high enough to bind the knees of Christian's horse, and flounder another on to his head; while the gee of a Harborough flyer is so accustomed to make a clean sweep of everything in his path, that he positively declines the double shuffle, and sits down in the brook to watch the turn of affairs. Two more fences, a little more squeezing galloping, and a fortunate turn, put all on terms once more, though a baulking stile by the side of a gate places a veto on the further progress of one of the foremost rank, and even sends him home to finish the season in bandages. Then comes a half-minute check, recovered at once on the reappearance of the master (withheld for a time in the sticky rides of Owston), and the hunt again start fair, with fifty men in front who mean to ride, and each of whom is as good as (or better than) his neighbour. An oxer with an even front, but a 15-foot fly, comes as welcome as charity to a starving family. A cloud of them are over it all together, scarcely a rail cracking all along the line, though they take it as thick beside and behind each other as a flock of sheep over a trench.

Leaving Knossington to the right, the line of flight is borne gradually to the left, over the fine wild tract towards Burrough Hill, that has already been favoured more than once this year. Their game is now close before them; but, as is often the case with a sinking fox, they cannot push him as rapidly as when

he was fresh ; the run still goes on, but, though you must gallop, you have no longer to race. Passing between the villages of Burrough and Somerby, they are close at him, and as they cross the hill it seems a foregone conclusion that he means to die in the Punch Bowl. Horses are beginning to lag, though the ground rides firm and there has been no plough to draggle them. But Reynard knew of a refuge more secure than thorn or privet ; and just below the covert a sudden stoppage and a who-whoop proclaim that the thirty-eight minutes has ended in a rabbit-hole. Opinions will always differ about a run more than on any other subject ; and few men can persuade themselves to give one totally apart from their own personal feelings. Those who saw it from end to end said this was a glorious gallop ; those who were left in Owston Wood deemed it indifferent ; while those who only nicked in for the last ten minutes (and they were many) declared it was not fast enough. Among such a number of hard men and good it is impossible to give names, and still more difficult to learn who was to the front throughout. It was a question, too, of luck and skilful management quite as much as riding to keep a place. Little birds whisper to me, though, that Sir Fred. Johnstone, Lord Grey de Wilton, and Mr. Foster were amply upholding the honour of Melton ; while Mr. Robertson, Mr. Pennington, and two or three more, who knew well the features of every fence hereabout, were not one whit behind them. Of the ladies Miss Hartopp decidedly carried off the palm ; for she issued at the spot and moment from Owston Wood, completely distanced her fair competitors who had pressed her closely up to this point, and arrived at the Punch Bowl as soon as anyone.

So ended the season 1871-72, and it may be long before we look upon its like again. Wearing to horses and trying to pockets, it has been lavish of reward in such a frequent recurrence of glorious runs that the sport of ten years might have been condensed into this one. In our old age we shall be charged with maundering when we tell of the good things

of that famous season; but the memory will always be a treasure to ourselves, and we may confidently say now, " *Haec olim meminisse juvabit.*"

One more word, not about Leicestershire particularly, but about what is too often written from many countries at this time. If opportunity offers, the boast is sure to be put forward in print by some too zealous disciple of the Hunt that their



W. W. TAILBY, ESQ.

huntsman has killed so many brace of foxes during the past season. Now, this is encouraging the very feeling that every true sportsman, every lover of fair hunting, and every keen rider would wish above all things to see eradicated, and that public opinion and the press ought to stamp out. Then should we have more good runs, more beautiful hound work, and less rat-hunting than now; and a real huntsman would find his reputation enhanced rather than diminished by the reform. This is spoken from no feeling of maudlin sentiment, nor even solely from a love of fair play, but it expresses the opinion of

every man who hunts from a love of sport, and who feels sick and disgusted when he sees a good fox mobbed at starting, or dug out fresh and strong to be thrown to the hounds. A huntsman goes out to kill his fox. It is his object and aim, as it is that of a shooter to bag his partridges in September. But as well might the latter rake into his game in a furrow, or a courser knock a hare on the head in her form, as that *he* should be unscrupulous as to the means—and he, too, has not himself alone to please, but is in a manner catering for the amusement of the public, who at any time might buy a Reynard of their own to slay at leisure, were the mere sight of vulpine blood so dear to them. Sincerely is it to be hoped that such sanguinary vaunts may be consigned to the vast waste-paper room that underlies the office of *The Field*.



SEASON 1872-73.

TWO GOOD DAYS WITH THE AETHERSTONE.



BRIGHT sunny morning such as Friday, November 29th, when the Atherstone met at Newnham, augured not well for sport according to old-fashioned notions. But the last two seasons had completely cut to pieces all the dicta and wise saws that our progenitors stored up for us ; and taught us that, given the hypothesis of a moist earth and a warm one, all other conditions may stand over. There was always a scent last winter ; and as wet increased, hounds ran faster

and with greater certainty—no matter whether the sun shone, the wind blew, or the glass went down. So it is at present ; and for once hunting men are content, fearful only of a change. On the day of which I am speaking the barometer pointed to all sorts of dreadful things and threats unutterable ; for it had gone beyond its vocabulary, culminating in Much Rain and Stormy. We looked at the cloudless smiling heaven, sniffed the balmy air, looked again at the glass, and finally came to the conclusion that in this, as in other things, extremes some-

times meet, and that the indicator must be bent on a short cut to the Set Fair side of the question.

Such a lovely day of course made the ride to covert pleasant, the meet pretty (if it isn't so in the beautiful park at Newnham, where should it be ?), and company generally as amiable as aldermen. So much for the preliminaries, now for the proceedings. There is a little harbour right in the centre of the park (Burton Pool, so called), equally a favourite resort of fox and fowl. Whether they live in harmony therein, like the lion and lamb of prophecy, or whether Reynard finds enjoyment in licking his chops among the willows while he watches the wild ducks swim about in security—like a hungry urchin flattening his nose against a confectioner's window—I leave it to the presiding velveteen to say. Anyhow, as usual, the ducks rose and Reynard ran ; and to-day being devoted to the chase and not to the gun, the latter individual found that the delicate attention was meant for him alone. He slipt at once into the adjoining wood, and disappeared a slight comely youth ; but—as in the case with which we were satiated to nausea last summer—his reappearance was in the shape of a burly giant more fitted to cope with trial and persecution.* Big and powerful he looked as he showed himself across the open. Some little plough and a few light fences ere hounds get on the grass and can swing along in the style that you come to Leicestershire to see. They seem careful of their followers, though, as they get to the end of one of the big bullock pastures near Ullesthorpe, and find a horrid wire stretched to catch or kill ; but they take the line on without a halt over the railway, and across the ploughs beyond. A more perfect piece of quick hunting was never seen than along their course towards Bitteswell. A mile from the brick kilns there came a holloa to tell of a fox travelling on the right. The field took it up, as they ever delight in the chance of doing ; but not a hound turned her head, nor did Castlemayne do more than encourage

* Tichborne joke explained for future generations.

them to their present work. Another moment or two and they were rewarded by getting on to the sweet meadow grass ; and away they sped at once with a vengeance. Have I made it clear ? They had been going well for these twenty minutes, never dawdling, but not racing. Well, for the *next* twenty, they made as sharp and pretty a steeplechase of it as ever was ridden over an unflagged course. The well-drained turf of the little meadows rode springy as indiarubber, the fences came every hundred yards—some of them to be taken where you chose, but many with only a single weak point that it was hard enough to find in the moment you had for seeking it. Were your steed impetuous, you were raked into one fence when you scarcely thought yourself over the previous. Was your mount inclined to be “sticky,” you had hardly recovered him after his last scramble before you were called on to rouse him for his next effort. “Hold hard ! this accursed wire again !” The only apparent outlet has an ominous post before it, while the bottom hedge is undoubtedly wired. Mr. Muntz, however, won’t believe in it, and the old grey’s good effort meets with a check that might have stopped his jumping career for ever, while horse and rider rattle over the wire with no worse injury than the fright. There is a clear space at the corner, after all, and it is made available immediately the fallen pair are seen to rise in safety. Over the next three or four little inclosures instinct is the only guide in riding to catch the hounds, who are glancing through the thick fences like rabbits. Gallop as you like, though, and pop up and down as quickly as you can jump, they get to the Bitteswell Brook some three hundred yards in front of their earliest followers. It is all down-hill to it ; the ridges slope firm and smooth to its banks, which are fringed with just sufficient thorn to form a low screen. But the sodden earth and the quick-recurring fences have acted perceptibly already ; muscles are relaxing, chests are heaving with long-drawn sobs, and the heads that have been carrying themselves so proudly now hang lead-like on the bit. Pull him together you must, though it needs an effort severe as a close run-in

from the distance post. "Stir his courage with the steel!" as Sir Walter has it; "Sting him to jubilance!" as Mr. Myers puts it; "Gash him well in the last two strides," as Bob Chapman expresses it; with a mighty heave get his quarters well underneath him, and you are bound to go somewhere into the next field—though a scuffle and a scramble leave a long doubt of the success of your entry. A couple of rustics are delightedly pointing out one of the widest spots as each fresh comer looks eagerly for a guiding signal, which after all is meant, like the wrecker's beacon, only for his destruction. One by one half-a-dozen horsemen come down at the tilt, some to fall, all to scramble; and already the chase is far over the hill. Lutterworth steeple is a landmark right in front, and the hounds are apparently racing for it, when, within two fields of it, they dive into a gravel pit, where many a cub has grown up under the fostering shadow of Wycliffe's temple. The earths are stopped; but their good fox has found just time enough to see the door is closed against him, and to scale the bank before they enter. As he crosses the poor-allotments above he has exchanged signals with another of his race, who probably found himself blocked out over-night; and, starting him forward with the fear of the pack close following at his heels, himself has dragged his wearied limbs in an opposite direction.

The run was over now; for naturally enough the pack went on with the forward line. But the scent had changed; and the present fugitive, when they got up to him at Misterton, was found to be a very unworthy substitute for the good animal that furnished this delightful forty minutes.

Friday, December 6th, treated them well in the matter of scent. From Twelveacres hounds got away on the best of terms, and were able to grapple to their work at once. It's heart-breaking galloping over a plough, but you *must* do it at a start if you hope to see what goes on. The only alternative now is to macadamise with an eye to Newnham; but you had better take your cropper over that hairy stake-and-bound, or

smash the wide-set rail in the corner, than get into the lane whence there is no escape. Half-a-dozen fields, and already the van is (in numbers) a weak one. Mr. Brooks is neither a feather-weight nor a chicken, but he is sending the chesnut along as if to wipe out the remembrance of the broken limb of last year. Mr. Braithwaite has a still more permanent injury; but if he can hold his own over High Leicestershire, he surely will here; and he can keep his horse straight at an awkward place, or pull him together over ridge-and-furrow, as well as if he had an *extra* bridle arm. Mr. Hipwell has something black and youthful under him; but this is the kind of mount to which he is most used, and he is making fast running on the right, while the huntsman leads the left flank. The country towards Cotesbach and Lutterworth is beautiful undulating grass, and, for that reason possibly, seldom chosen by foxes. Our present friend had not heart enough to take a bold plunge into it, with the pursuing melody so nearly in his ears; so, swinging round in a semicircle that threw half his followers off as if yielding to centrifugal force, he bent round for Ullesthorpe.

Moments of rare and fleeting light
That show themselves, like grains of gold
In the mine's refuse, few and bright.

For a quarter of an hour they spun along, over fences that wanted jumping and turf that wanted condition, till they got close up to their fox as they reached a little plantation above Ullesthorpe village. Now they had to put their noses down (as they *can* do with any pack in the Midlands), but after hunting him a mile or two were holloaed on to another fox and eventually gave up the game before reaching Bitteswell.

*THE LAST RUN OF 1872 WITH THE
COTTESMORE.*

SATURDAY, December 28th, is more worth telling about, can I but tell it properly. The Cottesmore met at Leesthorpe, so said those who breakfasted at a proper hunting hour, which, as the meet was close at hand, few from Melton did. To see the Punchbowl stirred, though, there was such a gathering of good men round its upper rim as even this famous resort has seldom witnessed. Lord Lonsdale had brought an unusually strong force into the field; the Duke of Rutland had spared many a stout adherent to represent him here; Mr. Tailby headed his champions; Mr. Coupland led forth the Quornites to a man. No wonder there was such an eager rush, when the hounds were laid on along the crest of the hill, that at first they could make no head on the line. Nor was it till the field were clustered on the eminence overhanging the Steeplechase course that, looking down, they discovered two hounds stealing on with the scent. The body of the pack were carried on to join them, which they did as they gained the high ground to the left of Burrough village, and here the run began.

They got together and slipped away at once over the road and down into the valley beyond—so quickly and suddenly that only the huntsman, Sir Frederick Johnstone, Col. Forester, and one or two others knew they were away till they had a start of a couple of fields of plough. Deep plough is scarcely ground on which to make up lost time, more especially when, as now, each foot-lifting is a labour; nor did narrow crowded gateways and a fifty-acre piece of ridge-and-furrow (so guiltless of drainage that both landlord and tenant must be bankrupt, or at the least deserve to be) facilitate the task of catching them as they flew along the vale. Had they raced on, the quicker few never would have been caught; but the hesitation of a second or two lets up some twenty more, and then the pace grows hot again as they round Burrough, the village on their



Five loose horses are careering about at once; five pairs of Bartley's are stumbling over the fallow; and five pairs of lungs are grasping a wild entreaty to "Stop him!"

right. A deep down-hill fence, of nondescript style and difficulty, puts two good couple *hors de combat*. The next is indeed a teaser, where the best horse in the Shires might crack under the saddle. A fair broad ditch to smile in your face, a high plashed fence frowning blackly above it, like the laughing eyes you may often see, that tell not so truly of the nature within as the dark cruel brows that can carry no false expression. It may be a lion heart and stout loins that are under you; but these will scarcely take you beyond a second ditch, grass-grown, invisible, and wide. Five loose horses are careering about at once, five pairs of Bartley's are stumbling over the fallow, and five pairs of lungs are gasping a wild entreaty to "Stop him!" The survivors have escaped, either with a long-drawn struggle, or by making use of a breach effected by a less fortunate forerunner.

Now the chase is fairly in the wild open Twyford country, still bearing to the right over a tract where no human figure diverts the fox in his course, where scarcely a sheep or bullock is found to foil the line, where old turf clothes every field, and where the fences are of good old-fashioned growth—a dozen outlets in each. Three fine days and a kindly wind have already made the grass ride firmer than it has done for weeks; and, though the pace is not Newmarket, hounds keep running, so that it is all galloping, such as a hunter can command and continue. Fifty men are riding almost abreast, each of whom one might gladly take—yet scarcely dare to follow—as pilot over any line in Leicestershire. Now they bear slightly to the left, sinking lower down the broad hillside that they have been skirting for some minutes;

Then to the shore of one of those long loops
Where thro' the serpent river coiled, they came.
. . . . The banks were steep; the stream
Full, narrow.

The well-known Twyford brook it is. Not a very formidable serpent certainly; but one that is not to be overcome at any

point, and powerful enough to have beguiled many a good man to destruction—as it will again to-day.

As is too often the case, hounds did not cross it at once—else would it have been charged in numberless places—but, running along its brink, waited till they had their field huddled up where the stream was widest and muddiest before turning over it. Col. Forester, who has been cutting out the work and pioneering the young ones throughout, is the first to charge it where it seems most practicable, and gets over with a splash and scramble. The next essayist adds a roll and the loss of his hat to the Colonel's performance, and effectually blocks this passage for a time. Several attempts are made in the same field, but each and all of them result in disastrous failure. Meanwhile the quickest had popped over the side fence, driven straight down at the brook (Custance on the Duke of Hamilton's old steeplechaser, the "Doctor," leading one band), and found that here it was much more negotiable. A ford was also hit off almost immediately, and all went on in pursuit of Col. Forester's grey, who was now a field ahead of the nearest.

There is little more to tell. The hounds threw up just below John o' Gaunt; and though their good bold fox had obviously brought them all this way up wind with a view to the refuge, from which he must have been driven but yesterday, they could not mark him into the covert. Thus ended as pleasant a thirty-five minutes as the season had produced—fast enough for anyone, time and country considered. There was dirty work for valets that night; for falls seemed to have been more the rule than the exception. Then home, with the thrushes singing in the mild evening, as if spring had already followed Christmas.

The Pytchley inaugurated 1873 with a fast good run of fifty-five minutes on the 1st of January, from Stanford Hall, of which the following are the particulars. Found in the Rookery, went away towards Walcote, and ran in the shape of the letter S by Swinford to Shawell Wood. This could not

have been much less than four miles ; but it was done in fifteen minutes—Capt. Featherstonhaugh and Mr. Samuda conspicuous in front, with the huntsman half a field behind them. The hounds ran the length of the wood as fast as they could get through it, out at the bottom, past Shawell village and to the Watling-street road, round nearly to Catthorpe and back to Shawell Wood—before reaching which he was seen dead beat. Here the scent seemed to fail, and, the covert being very thick, he managed to slip them.

The afternoon was marked by a most melancholy occurrence in the death of Major-General Mayow, late Deputy Quarter-master-General in Ireland, and one of the oldest members of the Pytchley hunt. He fell dead off his horse during the run, in the middle of a grass field, and while in conversation with Mr. Atterbury of Welford Lodge. The latter had just remarked that they were on the wrong side of the brook ; and the general replied, “Never mind, we must go along here now ;” when, as he finished the sentence, he suddenly fell to the ground. Two doctors were at hand almost immediately ; but life must have been extinct before he left the saddle. It was a sad shock to his many friends who were out, and who came up to see the fine soldierlike figure, so long familiar, now carried away lifeless to his house at Clipston.

A BELVOIR BURST.

WEDNESDAY, Jan. 8th.—A good drying wind had been indulging us for the last twenty-four hours, and the gem of the week on the Melton side was with the Belvoir—a sweet burst of sixteen or seventeen minutes, such as for years they have been famous for. The meet was held at Saltby, chiefly with a view to an old customer known to reside in Sproxton Thorns. Coston Covert is generally drawn on the way there, and no place has been more redundant of quick things in past

years than this. But two or three blank draws this season had so far obscured its ancient glory, that to-day there was little of the eager expectancy shown that has so often been an attribute of a visit here. Hard men and keen were content to coffee-house and loiter about while it was being drawn, and seemed taken by surprise when Gillard's unmistakable note told that a fox was away. However, they all got round by the time the hounds were out, and every man started as good as his neighbour. It was of course a matter of moment to get quickly over the first two or three crowded fences; but after this the question was simple enough, being merely whether your horse could go and stay. The fences took some jumping, but they were equally to be jumped everywhere, so there was none of the waiting for your turn so heart-rending when hounds are forging ahead. They were now running up wind with a scent that kept them ever straining their utmost, and from end to end it was a steeplechase. Indeed, there chanced to be no less than four steeplechase cracks riding in the van—four gallant captains, whose knowledge of pace has often been proved at Rugby, at Windsor, and at Liverpool. Of these (Capts. Tempest, Smith, Riddell, and Barker) the last named not only suffered the unpleasantness of being dug out from underneath his mare, but still further misfortune awaited him in finding her back was broken. Rumour tells me that yet other mishap befell some of the quartette; but this is not my business. Col. Forester, too, was ably supporting the British army—so far as young blood (his horse's) would allow. Lord Grey de Wilton and Gillard were riding side by side, and Mr. Turnor, of Stoke, showed that they have not yet become provincial in the Vale of Belvoir. With one or two exceptions, all the rest of the field were completely choked off by the extremity of the pace, and the depth of the half-dozen distressing ploughs that occurred before reaching Woodwell Head. On the way a slight detour had been made towards Wymondham; but there was no moment of breathing time throughout. After running the covert, the run was over at

once—the fox having probably turned short back. Certainly he could have gone no further in the teeth of the wind. There was a wonderful variety of nationality out, showing—if it showed anything—that our national pastime is daily drawing recruits from the Continent. There were French, Italian, Hungarian, German, and men of decidedly foreign appearance from Grantham or elsewhere.

A QUORN FOREST INCIDENT.

I MUST tell a little episode that occurred last week in the Quorn woodlands. Be it known that the sporting proclivities of the city of Leicester are increasing in proportion as its hosiery and elastic web manufactories grow in importance, though much of this devotion to the chase is in its embryo state. The most popular mode of gratifying it is at present the co-operative system, which allows one quadruped and two pair of wheels to give large parties some individual share in the sport. On or about New Year's Day a vehicle appeared carrying five portly personages to hunt with the Quorn in the merry Charnwood Forest. Mirth and glee were as little wanting as well-stocked hampers and huge cigar cases, and the whole turn-out suggested pastime as improved by the civilisation of the nineteenth century. The driver was an old hand at his work, knew every road and covert in this sylvan district; and had he but known the capabilities of his vessel as well, 'tis probable his freight would have returned in safety and good humour to port.

A long story may be shortened by relating briefly that, departing in a rash moment from the highways under care of a paternal Government, Jehu undertook the passage of a grassy green ride, where wheels were seldom wont to go. The shandrydan was of a somewhat peculiar build, four wheels and one seat—something like a lifeboat previous to being launched

—Jehu being accommodated on the knee of the stoutest of the party. Of a sudden the weight above and the depth below proved too much for the chariot, which parted amidships. The horse and two wheels proceeded onwards ; the body of the vehicle remained behind, after casting forth its occupants in divers directions in the mud. Four of them sat and stared at each other with piteous expression ; one of them started up and ran haphazard into the wood ; while Jehu showed more sense than any of the party by lying full length in the side ditch and roaring lustily for brandy. Meanwhile the horse careered down the ride with the two wheels dangling at his heels, and cut into the first knot of horsemen like an Assyrian war chariot, scattering them right and left like chaff. The group in front of them were up wind, and could hear nothing of the shouts of the first victims as the enemy came down upon them with increased velocity, and charged right into their midst. Each wheel did its work as effectively as ever did the glittering scythe of classic warfare ; took each steed an inch or two below the hocks, and swept him off the face of the earth—or at least some yards away, where they lay prone and helpless amid such a babel of naughty language as should bring no good future on this desecrated forest.

A RED LETTER WEEK.

A WEEK of wonderful sport was ended Saturday, January 11th, the four concluding days containing such items as these : Wednesday, a brilliant seventeen minutes' burst with the Belvoir, of which I have already briefly spoken ; Thursday, fifty minutes without a check with the Quorn ; Friday, a twenty-five minutes' gallop and a kill in the open with the same pack ; and Saturday, the fastest thing of the year (twenty-five minutes) with the Cottesmore.

The mass of geographical matter accumulated by a *résumé* of

the whole week's hunting has a very local and doubtful interest. The Leicestershire squire, who measures every run on his ordnance map immediately on his return home, who will dip his finger in his port and trace every turn again on his mahogany, and who looks upon the course of a fox as the central interest of a hunt, may perchance wish for solid topical information. But the busy merchant, after his week's work (whose partner is now enjoying the yearly holiday that for him has just expired); the soldier back from "first leave" in his wooden kennel at Aldershot; the parson seeking relaxation between his services; and the colonist, with his heart still in the sports of the Old Country—these care less for intricate route-tracing than for the picturing of such trifles as recall their own happy experiences to memory.

The party that answered the summons of the "members card," announcing a bye-day at Brooksby Hall for Thursday (Jan. 9), would have been a large field in many countries; but, what is always much pleasanter, it was a field altogether free from the rough element that crops up at an advertised meet near a large manufacturing town. In fact, there were nearly all of the Quorn kingdom there who would lend grace to a day's hunting or do justice to a good run, while there were none of those whose presence might mar either.

The morning might be passed over without mention, had it not been marked by a most unfortunate accident to Lady Ida Hope. During a slow hunting run after an outlying fox, which occupied from about twelve to one o'clock, she was thrown at a fence, and it was found that the small bone of her arm was broken.

Time enough there was, as hounds left Cream Gorse on their fox, to jump off and unfasten the gate out of the lane, through which could be seen quartering after quartering of green grass, stretching down the valley and clothing the slopes beyond. Soon every ridge was carrying its burden; sweeping down to charge each fence in double and treble line. The short distance to the Melton turnpike road had both quality and variety to recom-

mend it. With hounds running fast, there is no prettier course than over the meadows and good fences which border it. These they held along for some little way, then turned into the road, took quick advantage of a signal half a mile down it, and popping out, went on at once towards Rotherby, the unbroken face of each hedge showing how seldom hounds had come this way. Those who tempted the Rotherby oxers read themselves a sharp lesson, that should tend to develop their bump of locality for future use. The farmers of Brooksby and Rotherby would seem to have executed their fences under some special contract with the fiend of destruction. Untempting in appearance and uncompromising in reality are these unique erections. An ox-rail is seldom a welcome addition to a stiff fence, still less is it nice to find it set a full horse's length beyond; but when all this combination is supplemented by a second ditch, the hope of getting over becomes a very forlorn one indeed. The first to present a picture similar in effect and colouring to a rabbit bowled over as he goes away from you was one who ought to have had opportunities of learning what spots should be marked Dangerous. The smash dissipated at least some of the impossibility of the place, but the next was (like the inner line of a fortress) similar but stronger still.

Lord Grey de Wilton took it where an upright palisade reared its head in the midst; his good chestnut made a tremendous effort, surmounted all he could see, but was brought to earth by the second ditch. Another chestnut was put at a like point a little lower down, with all the determination of one of the best men of the day (Capt. Smith); but the five-year-old's heart sank within him—he floundered helplessly into the middle, to be extricated from the ox-rail only after a lateral scramble of some yards. It was a hard man and a bold horse that essayed to follow Lord Grey; but the attempt ended in the disestablishment of the church into the bosom of the thicket, and a sore crown of thorns was the martyr's fate (Rev. T. Hassall). Thus were the adventurers accounted for, one and all; the wiser or more fortunate many following the hounds

down the big open pasture alongside. A great source of chuckle were these disasters to the agriculturists of the district, one of whom is said to have delivered himself thus, the while he grinned the grin of irony :—" Oi reckon it took ye all yer time to master them joomps i' Rotherby town-soide ; " then added apologetically, " We're forced to set 'em pretty middling strong for them big Welsh bullocks." *Pretty middling strong* forsooth ! Heaven save us (and our wives and sweethearts) from what this cold-blooded rustic would give a positive denomination to !

Some platelayers at work on the line saved them from the impending stoppages from iron and water, and turned the fox right back in his course. He skirted the village of Rotherby, hounds still running hard ; and the field debouched, some on one side of it, some on the other, again on to the Leicester and Melton turnpike. The right division held along the Gaddesby road, with the pack on the three small ploughs close parallel. Those on the left, among them Lord Carington, Mr. Hassall, Capt. Riddell, and Mr. Westley Richards, lost the rest of the run by an untoward accident which befell Lord Grey de Wilton (who had been cutting out the majority of the work up to this). On landing over a small fence his horse was caught up in a sheep net, fell heavily on and then rolled twice over him—crushing him so much that he was picked up for dead. Though not as bad as at first supposed, the injury was serious enough—the muscles of one shoulder being so lacerated that he is likely to be missed from his place for some time.

To Gaddesby the pace was maintained up to its present standard, with twice a short breathing moment ; but one field from Mr. Cheney's house hounds set off with a renewed vigour that promised a speedy end either to the pursued or to his pursuers. This thirty minutes had been severe enough to stretch the girths of every horse engaged in it ; but the next twenty were absolutely killing. Grass the whole of it, except two fields near Thorpe Satchville, but grass of the consistency of ordinary steam plough, hounds throughout forging well ahead—even of

Col. Forester, who, on a *whistler* belonging to Lord Wilton, cut down first four tremendous oak rails (and posts), and then all his followers. (It strikes me that, if the gallant colonel continues thus frequently to distinguish himself, I shall lay myself open to the charge of making too free use of his name.) From Gaddesby along the trying line to, and beyond, Thorpe Satchville, he took almost every fence first, and that he had decidedly the best of the run is an assertion at which no one will be found to cavil. One by one horses were seen to labour and falter; one by one they rolled feebly through their fences—the freest and truest jumper soon pulling up on the brink of each to make his effort from a stand; and one straggler after another dropped off to trot along the adjacent road, which happily could lend its aid to the end. The string of coverts which it skirts (Cream Gorse, Ashby Pastures, and Thorpe Trussells) were all left a few fields away. A stifling hill just opposite Ashby Pastures was the stopping point of many of the present remnant of the field; and it was almost pitiful to see the hard struggle that the small gap on its summit caused every steed in turn. But the master, with Tom Firr, Col. Forester, Capt. Smith, Messrs. Pryor and Chaplin, and Major Paynter (all but the first-named, curiously enough, riding chestnuts), toiled on still; and though others nicked in afterwards at various points (Thorpe Village, Adam's Gorse, &c.), these were all who lived with the hounds throughout. Fifty minutes saw the first real check above the Melton steeplechase course, opposite Burrough Hill. A flock of sheep had foiled the line as the fox (just before them) made a short turn; and though the huntsmen tried hard to pick him up, and hit upon his track under two or three hedgerows below the grand stand, he managed to crawl away in safety.

On the next day, too (Saturday, Jan. 11), the Quorn further followed up their successes by a first-rate fifty minutes in their forest country, again killing their fox in the open.

But for pace and straightness we have as yet had nothing to compare with the gallop of the Cottesmore on the last-named

day. After passing the morning in a long slow hunt from Stapleford Park, containing no particular feature beyond its dulness, they found themselves close to Ranksborough—which has quite risen again to its former strength and fame. One of the woodland foxes, probably disturbed from his home by the Quorn foray of the week before, had taken up a temporary lodgment here, and now evacuated so hastily that numbers of the field never heard of a find until too late to take any advantage of it. Quick as he slipped away at the top, the pack were out almost as quickly. From that moment till the run was over, they fairly trod upon his heels, and coursed him with the determined, unfaltering swiftness that is the quintessence of a real Leicestershire burst. Having once got his head clear by rounding the long wood under Cold Overton, he held it straight and unflinchingly over the grass till he made good the shelter of Owston Wood. From the moment of starting it was a race for the swift and for the stout—no getting a pull at your horse throughout. It was a run, in fact, the enjoyment of which depended in every degree on the blood, condition, and staying powers of your steed. The fences were comparatively easy—or, at all events, were invested with difficulty only by the extremity of the pace; but the grass was holding, even on the ridges, and sticky as resin in the furrows. A hundred men were battling over the pastures below Cold Overton, fifty were in the strife as they passed above Knossington, and some five were in time to see the head of the pack enter Owston Wood. Of the hounds themselves, there were stragglers some two fields back—not from any deficiency on their part, but rather because they were so evenly matched that the tail hounds could never make up lost ground.

Above Cold Overton village there were many causes to play havoc with the field. The breasted ascent had thickened the respiration of anything of at all inferior type or inferior condition; several quick riders bore to the left with an eye to Orton Park Wood; some eschewed a deep ridge-and-furrow, into which the smoothest galloper pitched with the same apparently hope-

less plunge as a good ship in the monster swells off the Cape, while others here allowed hounds to creep ahead beyond recovery. A fifty-acre-piece of natural irrigation and two small inclosures brought the hounds to a second road. Mr. Arthur Coventry was quicker out of it than anybody else, and for the mile or so of descent to Ladywood held a clear lead—hanging a new decoration on the family shield. Sir Fred. Johnstone is not often slipped away from, and was gliding over the fences and still constant turf in close pursuit, with Capt. Atkinson equally handy. Jack West was scurrying along next, his horse dwelling a little too long at his jumps to put him quite on a par with the trio in front. As they skirted Ladywood, Sir Frederick went on in front (Capt. Atkinson getting into an impenetrable bullfinch), and up to Owston Wood was nearest to the leading hounds, still a hundred yards ahead. Mr. Finch came up in the last field, and close behind were Mr. Barnard, Lord Wilton (in spite of his recent illness), and Col. Burnaby—the pace having told terrible tales on the bulk of the remainder.

What might have been the exact time of this typical burst I am unable to say. It lasted for something between twenty and thirty minutes—nearer the latter than the former. The hurry of the start precluded the noting of its commencement, and the excitement of participation (actual or attempted) prevented thought of any stolid assessment. Could Moore have drawn his argument from a memory of this kind, think you, when he wrote :—

Ne'er ask the hour ; what is it to us
How Time deals out his treasures ?
The golden moments lent us thus
Are not *his* coin, but Pleasure's.
If counting them o'er could add to their blisses,
I'd number each glorious second ;
But moments of joy are, like *Lesbia's* kisses,
Too quick and too sweet to be reckon'd.

But to return to material fact. It seemed a hundred to one on the hounds killing their fox, as they plunged into the wood, chivied him in view up a ride, and carried their bloodthirsty

chorus into its depths. But, as usually the case in this well-preserved domain, they were baffled by numerous fresh discoveries, scattered, and had finally to be withdrawn—after the most dashing gallop of the year.

Such a week of sport it has never been my fortune to chronicle before ; and I question if anyone now hunting can look back upon its superior.

MARKET HARBORO'.

“ LEICESTERSHIRE,” for the previous week, slunk into the diary—meagre, spiritless, and disappointed—just as the dowagers of the county and of Northamptonshire were mar-shalling their charges in the cloak room of the Market Harboro’ Hunt Ball, previous to an entry in state. Covey after covey, brood after brood, emerged from their snug nests in brougham or barouche, shook out their feathers, and flocked in. About the elder birds, as they led their charges up the full length of the room, there hung a conscious stateliness, a becoming magnificence, a kind of genial pomp, that was all it should be on such occasions—while from both sides bold critical men eyed each lot as freely as if behind their club windows on a Drawing-room day. The young birds—with a plumage less brilliant, perhaps, but softer and more *ravissant* by far than their leaders’—hopeful, expectant, even tremulous, but with cheeks calm and unruffled as masterpieces of Mme. Rachel. In many cases, likely enough, a first appearance—but did high-bred damsel ever yet betray that this was her maiden ball, or has a man yet been found with perception acute enough to discover it ? Certes, the sex show their blood and birth here in a way that was never given to the male patrician ! See one of them enter her first ball-room, finding herself suddenly in a scene dazzling in its brightness and electrifying in its novelty. Will she not carry her head as high, and look around with a glance as steady and self-possessed as a three-season beauty

who has witnessed a hundred routs? Papa ever seemed the only uncomfortable one of the party, and appeared far less the "jolly old cock" than when an hour or two later he was to be seen beyond the precincts of the ball room, enjoying the princely hospitality of Messrs. Murietta, and talking foxes and turnips with a brother squire of the same good sort. Every house in the two counties seemed to have brought a strong party to swell the gathering; and, besides these, there were waifs and strays from every shire and province in the three kingdoms. As many different hunts were represented as at a general meeting at Boodle's. The green of Cheshire was there to fraternise with the white collar of Northamptonshire. Nimrod of the flints of Kent was comparing notes with Nimrod of High Leicestershire. Devonshire and Charnwood Forest were to be seen discussing with friendly vehemence the scenting qualities of their respective rocks and glens. Scotsmen were full of Capt. Thomson's resuscitation in Fifeshire, and Irishmen of Lord Spencer's invitation to his Pytchley tenants; while the Londoner had brought his red coat down, to show that if he is not hunting this year he *has* done so, and hopes ere long to hunt again. There was a display of scarlet as lavish as at a regimental ball—showing that the good old custom of our forefathers, of standing by their colours by night as well as day, is fully reasserting itself. (How much better would it be, too, if we, in our modern bad taste, could recognise that the shapeless black nether garments, now worn with the pink, are in harmony neither of hue nor tradition with that part of the dress which we have already re-adopted.) But not even the bright liveries of the foxhunters could throw into the shade the varied tints and effects at which their sisters had so successfully aimed. In

Violet, rose or pearl hued, or soft blue,
Golden or green, the light now blended,
Now alternate—

they made a picture, in comparison with which all the efforts of a kaleidoscope would seem dull and colourless.

A pretty ball room and a cool one, good music, good management, and good company are all necessary elements of success; but it is more than this—it is the presence of a cheery good-feeling (emanating from the existence of a common interest and a common source of pleasure), and the total absence of the exclusiveness of clique or party feeling, that make the Harboro' ball what it is—the best hunt ball in England. Everybody seemed bent on hunting with the Pytchley on the morrow, and on a doubt being expressed as to its practicability, the master was chased round the room by importunates as though he numbered the clerk of the weather among his hunt servants. Actual frost, however, held off as long as the programme lasted; scarcely anybody, therefore believed in its coming, and almost with one accord they danced out an hour of "extras," happy in the belief that a day's hunting must work off all ill effects.

Well, it did freeze with daylight, but thawed again so quickly, that the snow remaining from Wednesday night's downfall could be the only plausible hindrance. By the way, I should have mentioned that Mr. Tailby, waited upon only by the Messrs. Gosling, Mr. A. Murietta, and one or two others, had eked out a very fair hunting run this day (Thursday), though jumping and quick riding were impossible, and gateways were drifted in some places girth-deep. This was from Shangton Holt, and was comprised in a ring towards Norton, hounds floundering through the hedgerows, and horses throwing snow-balls up at their riders' heads.

On Friday morning, therefore, a strong force set out from Harboro', arrayed in no doubtful garb, but in full dress and confidence, and wended their way to Clipston Windmill. Some of the ditches were choked, and somewhat terrifying to those who meditated crossing them; but these were the exception, and the turf itself was clean and soft in the Clipston neighbourhood. However, twelve o'clock arrived, but no hounds: one o'clock, and not even a whip; so at last the matter was given up in despair, and all hands returned sorrow-

fully from whence they came. There was very little of the spirit of charity or Christian patience apparent in the cavalcade that moved back to Harboro', subdued but not silent; and methinks I heard more than one denunciation muttered.

Certainly to be left so long in doubt by no means softened



COLONEL F. ANSTRUTHER THOMSON.

As true a huntsman doth he look,
As bugle e'er in break did sound,
Or ever holloaed to a hound.

the final disappointment; and, though it might be thought inadvisable to hunt, there might at least, on such an occasion, have been a meet with all the proper accessories. However, it is only due to the master to say that there was still such a quantity of snow in the country round Kelmarsh, that anyone forming his opinion there could not but conclude that hunting was out of the question.

A WOLD DAY WITH THE QUORN.

ON Monday, Feb. 10, the wind was no warmer, but the ground had been cleared and softened sufficiently to allow of hunting with the Quorn at Widmerpool New Inn—which, by-the-bye, is fully as venerable an edifice as most hostelries calling themselves “New Inns.” There is what is known as the grass side of Widmerpool, meaning the Curate and Parson coverts and their neighbourhood; and there is the Nottingham side, where Roehoe, Kinoulton, *et hoc genus omne*, open out a corner of Leicestershire so unlike the rest of this favoured county that at some period or other it cannot but have fallen under such a ban as Burns pronounces :—

Stern Ruin's ploughshare drive elate
Full on thy bloom,
Till crush'd beneath the furrow's weight
Shall be thy doom !

In a very dry season this latter division meets even with some slight commendation, on account of the scent-carrying properties of the ground, and the coverts generally attract a good supply of foxes, which are well taken care of. But in ordinary seasons it is not beloved of those who hunt in a grass country for a grass country's sake ; while in a season like the present one it is held in thorough dread—I was going to say abomination, but that would not be true, with memory still fresh as to the samples of sterling sport that have been obtained therein. Many good runs have been seen in this plebeian-looking region —e.g., the thirty-five minutes with the mangey little animal that fairly raced away from Mr. Muster's Quorn pack two years ago—yes, and there was a goodly measure of sport over—or through—it to-day, even if it was not of a sensational nature.

Hounds were scarcely in Kinoulton Gorse before a fox essayed to take them straight back the way they had come ; but, finding this impossible in the face of the approaching field, now turned his attention to choking them off in the mud on the

other side of the Fosse road. With this idea he swung round Roehoe, just touching its far corner, and then plunged on into still deeper dirt. Over this the pack chased him at a great pace ; and, oddly enough, had only to begin to hunt when chance brought them across two solitary fields of grass, where bullocks had followed the track of the fox. Then they poked their way on till they came to the Curate, into which they at length traced their fox. Half-an-hour was spent in his dislodgement hence, when he broke away in the direction of Old Dalby before bearing back towards Kinoulton. A much better country now (chiefly grass), but such a hailstorm that made it a marvel how hounds were able to pick out a line when horses would not face the pelting storm. But they did hunt on, and very prettily too ; till—to make a long story short—Tom Firr got up to his fox at a farmyard two fields short of the covert from the place of finding, after an hour and a half's patient and excellent work. It was some time, though, before Reynard's whereabouts could be discovered. The huntsman first tried all round the buildings, then held a consultation with the old proprietress of the homestead, and finally made up his mind that the fox must be among the stacks. Hounds were evidently of the same opinion ; for they tried hard to climb the steep sides of the straw-rick. Shouting for a fork, Firr mounted to the top, helping some of the hounds up with him. Two or three of them quickly plunged into a hole after their game ; and a stifled growling soon proclaimed that slaughter was going on within. The rest of the pack were perched here and there, like the grouping of many a painted hound-scene, as they “hovered round to claim him for their own” ; till the huntsman completed his labour of disinterment, and they descended to join in the worry.

THE ASFORDBY RASPERS.

SUCH a run as fell to the lot of both the Quorn and Mr. Tailby on Monday last, makes a bright spot that will sparkle in memory long after the many late disappointments have gone into utter oblivion. The final draw of the Belvoir one day last week was for nothing less than a *kangaroo!* Towards the close of the day a man came up with intelligence that one of these animals, having escaped from captivity, was at large in the neighbouring wood—adding that “he was afraid to shoot it, for, having only a single-barrelled gun, he thought he might wound it and be attacked by the savage beast.” Accordingly the hounds were set to search for their novel game; when, getting on to a fox, they finished the day with an hour’s run.

A first fox, headed by footpeople and coursed by shepherd dogs at Holwell Mouth, and afterwards out-faced by surrounding rustics at Clawson Thorns, had nothing to do with the pith of the day. Far from it, shivering forms and open powder-flasks were the main features of the chilly hour spent above the latter covert. A fox was killed, hounds and huntsman worked very hard, and the two last-named earned what they most deserved.

Now to narrate the essence of the day’s amusement—Welby Fish Ponds for second draw, the field just ranging themselves on the hillside above, Earl Wilton anxiously surveying his gift to the hunt, Lord Grey of the same ilk mournfully nursing his injured arm (no flattery is it to say that every man who loves gallant riding feels a pang at the sight of the disablement of one who leads a Melton field as he can).

A holloa away over the plough before the hounds were in—only a bridle gate to get through, and two hundred keen men to pass it one at a time. The field had barely assembled in the green field which formed their vantage ground, when the sudden impulse from the sound of a find moved them like an electric shock. After the covert was threaded there was time to make up a plan of action while the huntsman was blowing

the hounds to a head, and the master was exerting his influence to give them a fair chance. A happy—or unhappy—distraction took place at the moment by a fresh fox jumping up and catching the eye of a horseman beyond the white gate of the bridle road to the right. Much mischief and trouble was afterwards dated back to that hat and cheer. The most self-confident and self-opinionated could scarcely set himself in opposition to the signal; so everyone, except the master, who went on to help the huntsman, and the whip, who went on to lose his cap in a bullfinch, turned up to the right to save a many-acred plough.

I should like to tell this burst properly; I should like to reproduce the incidents of those fleeting minutes; and I should like to have brought nearer what in the afterguard was throughout a catching vision just out of grasp. However, tantalisation engenders double enthusiasm; and lookers-on, even from behind, often see much of the game. That false turn to the right necessitated three fields of fallow for one it saved. Sixty or seventy men struggling to make up the ground lost at starting, yet fearful to make too much use of horses through holding arable. Only one hole in the bullfinch that separates them from the grand grass country over which master and men are now skying away a quarter of a mile ahead. Capt. Candy, Mr. Delacour, Capt. Stirling, and Mr. Foster first emerge from the hindering soil, and embark in pursuit. A sloping pasture helps them, and we all know that you can take liberties down hill. One, two, three men popping over the rasper in front in that quick jerky fashion that is best seen over the second fence of a steeplechase, when horses fly as if they never meant to come down again. The fourth comer, alas, is deceived by a pair of doubtful forelegs (the source of all roguishness and temper); comes round in the last stride, and brings two others with him. Capt. Barker, on Coronella, sweeps over it in his stride; and not one of these is aware that they have jumped a horrid wire, the mere sight of which would have turned the blood of each one cold. The next comer pitches upon it with a twang, that

should have tingled the ears of the farmer, who put up the foul engine, with a shame that cried murder. Happily and unexpectedly, the snare draws out ; but the chilling cry of wire is slight encouragement to the scores of good men just reaching the obstacle. On over the grass towards Asfordby, the next fence an old heathen that has apparently never been jumped before—not a vulnerable point in its composition, till Tom Firr hits off its one weak place, and bores a hole through its impenetrable looking face. Then ensue a succession of choking raspers (I can use no other expression), that cold blood would have deemed approachable only by a kangaroo or a Trotter, and would have wondered how so much good land could be wasted in growing blackthorn. Hot blood, however, must be served ; hounds are racing away three hundred yards in front ; and such moments might awaken the heart's blood of a mummy. Mr. Foster is to the front now ; and he and the huntsman are working side by side to break the stiff backbone of this stubborn country. Now and again they have to skirt up the whole of a narrow inclosure, only to find the easiest place a full measure of their horse's strength. So quick and sudden does one black and aged thorn fence succeed another, that there is no choice of place as each is opened out by the negotiation of its predecessor ; so hounds—running close and keen as wolves—are seldom in view, no time is given to hit off a feasible spot, and the leaders can make but a zigzag course. In the whole of the Quorn country there is no stiffer part than that which lies at the back of Asfordby Village. All the fences are formidable, many are unjumpable. How do you get out now, my gay pilots ?—not a smooth spot in the engirdling breakers that face you in your hasty despairing survey. Tom Firr is the first to make up his mind to the Curtian effort ; and, in a fashion that can only have been taught by Capt. Thomson, wriggles through a tangled bullfinch that had existence years and years before the “oldest inhabitant” of Asfordby. A forlorn hope it is, though—his horse prone in the ditch, his cap hung up on one side, and his whip torn out

of his hand on the other. Hounds still rattling on ahead, and each moment worth a pocketful of a sportsman's gold. But a huntsman's cap is like a knight's sworn gage—to lose it would be disgrace ; so Mr. Foster and the huntsman have both to dismount. Thirty seconds seem three hours ; but they can afford even this, so far have they forged ahead of all others—save the master and Capt. Barker, who are working round wide on the left. Firr's horse is already gasping, and he is glad of a gate before reaching the Asfordby Lane, while Mr. Foster flies the four rails at its side. Only one more stake and bound—wide, high, and extra-finished—before the road above Asfordby is crossed and the four reunite. Over the hill to Saxelby they have only to squeeze their horses and avoid the danger of another wire. Just as the village is reached the hounds throw up ; a holloa back proclaims the fox has been forced to double in the face of the pursuing field, and the quick part of the run is over. For twenty minutes they had been flying over the very stiffest piece of the Quorn country—*too stiff*, in fact, as it was impossible to live exactly in the track of the hounds, who, however, slipped through the hedges in an extraordinary way, and packed as close as mackerel throughout.

After turning back to Saxelby they went straight away for some *seven* miles from point to point, at last accounting for their fox at a stone culvert under a gateway, a mile or so beyond Goadby Gorse. It took them more than another hour to get there ; passing Welby Fishpond without entering it, thence on by Sysonby Lodge, close past Melton Spinney, and through Goadby Gorse. Altogether it was a splendid run, containing both a grand burst and a great deal of pretty hunting. Everybody seemed overflowing with ride ; and yet the hounds had fair play throughout the day.

*FROM WOODLANDS OVER THE GRASS WITH
THE COTTESMORE.*

IF masters of hounds, like managers of theatres, had to compete for patronage, each advertisement from the Midlands would to-day be headed "Uninterrupted Success!" "Continued Triumphs!" or some like laudation. Of a truth, the clouds have of late been pouring down good things as plentifully as they have sent forth snow, hail, rain, and wind. Who will pretend now to know or prophesy anything concerning sport, its probabilities and possibilities? Given every accident of wind or weather, of barometer or thermometer, there has yet been an influx of fine sport, such as no slight personal discomfort, no slight repinings on the subject of wet and mud, could mar. Let us take Tuesday, March 11th, 1872, as one example among the many that are worthy of recounting, and that I must be content to mention cursorily. An uncertain, unsettled day, with a glass that lowered throughout, and a sky that at times scowled blackly, as often broke furiously in rain and hail and snowstorm, and now and again turned round with a broad grin of sunny good humour. It was during one of these last moods that Launde Abbey witnessed the meet of the Cottesmore. Lawn meets such as this can have but little variety in description, though in practice they may differ one from another as faces in a photograph book. If I stop to attempt to picture, I shall be robbing space and time from record; so let it be enough to say that the old Abbey and its lofty frame of aged elms formed a fitting scene for the presence of such a concourse as had gathered now. There were scores of men there whose riding one may study and admire, and whose names will go far beyond their own time and circle; while of good sportsmen and genial characters the roster ran into hundreds. The Cottesmore dog pack, level and carefully chosen as they are, are by no means as taking to the eye as their neater and more active sisters, who form as pretty a lot

as any in the Shires, and who would perhaps have better set off the present picture; but that the former are stout and true at their work they have proved many times this season, and so they were about to prove again to-day.

The storm that broke over Launde Park Wood had just cleared when a delusion seized the field simultaneously on each side the covert that a fox had broken at its farthest end. The one half reached the fancied point of exit in time to find out their mistake, smooth down their wrinkles, and calmly to receive and jeer at the phalanx who came surging through the plough in hot haste from the opposite side.

After this it was too cold to stand still, too deep and soppy to move quickly about, too windy to smoke, and too early to eat lunch; and yet such is the blessed infatuation of hunting, that, though there were no signs of a find, and no prospect of a run when it did come (so said the sages), sportsmen were looking absolutely cheerful. Perhaps there was some slight unrecognised inkling in each prophetic soul of the prospect in store—or, more possibly still, a twelve o'clock meet had brought to the breakfast table of each good Conservative the result of last night's division.

At length they were led on to Rugby Bushes, gazing on the way with the awe of experience on the wild woodlands which now seemed to be hemming them in on every side. I did not see the wood drawn, but I heard the sudden cheerful clatter that burst forth in its midst, I saw the bright red form flash back across the road, and I almost saw the hackles of a good old squire rise as he waved his hat and cheered on the spotted forms bounding close behind. Swiftly, aye, savagely, the pack dashed into Loddington Redditch; and, though the turf along its side and up its length rode fairly firm and sound, they were out beyond as quickly as the foremost men could cover the distance. So they swooped down to Loddington Village, unhampered even by the unwelcome interference proffered by a sheep dog, and had put the road and a hundred yards besides to the good before their followers could reach the bottom. The fence

out of the road was to be jumped, but only with prompt self-sufficiency in the face of a crowd charging down it. At any rate, the dangerous quality was not to the fore now, and another hundred yards to a gate was accepted as the alternative. The pack had almost disappeared over the steep brow above the village as Mr. Gosling and Capt. Riddell rose it, and a sudden twist to the left unsighted them, and of course all behind, for half a moment; but they failed to make up very little of their ground as they chased down the half-dozen clean and pretty fences that smoothed the next mile. To Launde Wood the pace was good as need be, and so it was for some few minutes on beyond—half the pack by some mischance breaking with another fox into the wood, while the remainder kept on past it. The ugly gully interposing here had its one weak point, which Capt. Smith took little time to discover, and Mr. Thornton little more to break into a high road for those that came after. The next jump was a double in and out of a small stackyard, which, however pleasant it might have been to give a lead over, was, we mind well, trying enough when it came to *taking* one, for it rapidly assumed the character of a peat bog. A wide, cold plough brought the first check, or rather caused the first slow progress, for the hounds had to hunt their way unassisted through it, West having been delayed some time in his efforts to bring the deserters to his horn.

Thus far was the quick part of the run; but they failed not to do further justice to one of the stout straight foxes that have brought such credit to High Leicestershire of late years. Hunting quickly and well, though with only half their numbers, the hounds held on, giving their field both galloping and jumping (which, they tell me, is rapidly getting to be looked upon as a desirable adjunct to hunting in these parts) for some miles over a straight and beautiful line of country. Prior's Coppice was left wide on the right, Orton Park Wood as far out of the question on the left, till Oakham appeared in view, and Barleythorpe was within a few fields, when scent failed in

a wild withering storm, to which horses turned their backs—and when their fox had been viewed hard beat just before them. A truly sporting run was this, between seven and eight miles from point to point, which took about an hour to do, and embraced every phase of hunting. The ground rode deeper than it has done all this wet season—except perhaps the day following—and horses could often scarcely extricate their legs to jump even out of the grass. The blitheſt of them all was, not unnaturally, the one who jumped so many fences with only an empty saddle to carry, and galloped over the hounds as successfully as the keenest of us. He declined utterly to be caught by any of the horsemen, but at last yielded himself to a thrifty working man, having the financial soul—and success—of a Lowe. “All right, my good man; give him to me! Here’s half a crown for you! Look sharp! I’ll take him back!” “Noa, oi taakes him back myself”—grinning cunningly and greedily as he pictured half—or it might be a whole—sovereign from the panting friend behind. “Thank you, thank you,” gasped the latter, as he struggled up. “Here’s all the money I’ve got,” and left the financier gasping heartbroken at a *sixpence*.

A GOOD FINISH TO THE WEEK.

ON Friday, March 7th, the Quorn had a forty minutes, of such a character that many people put it at the top of the runs of the season. They first found a vixen in Gartree Hill, where they left her in peace; then went off to John o’ Gaunt, whence they did little but fill the Twyford Brook brimful with men and horses. Most of the wet ones now took their departure homewards, as did many with a dry coat and a slackness they afterwards rued, for from Cream Gorse dated the event of the day. From here they started exactly as on the good bye-day this year from Brooksby, but soon bore to the right, and went

such a clinker to Gartree Hill (going close to Guadalupe and well round Great Dalby) that every horse was ridden nigh to a standstill in the deep ground. Hounds raced clear ahead the whole way, Mr. Foster cutting out the work all the early part of the run, closely followed by Firr, Mr. Adrian Hope (till his horse refused), and Mr. Hassall—but as the run went on, positions varied constantly. Miss Cotton, at all events, was riding in superb style all day, as she was also on the following Wednesday. After leaving Gartree Hill they went on without pausing into and through the Punchbowl, and the first and final check occurred between Pickwell and Somerby, the hounds never having been cast or handled till now. However, they lost their fox here in the most inexplicable way, Firr's after-thought, that he might have taken advantage of one of some very old ivy-covered trees in the hedgerow where they threw up their heads, coming too late to be made any use of.

On Saturday, March 8th, the Cottesmore began the day by running clean into a splendid old fox in seventeen minutes from Oakham Pastures round the Manton country, after which they had some excellent sport from Owston Wood—and this in spite of difficulties. . After some time spent in the wood two foxes broke simultaneously—the one towards Knossington, the other to Whadboro' Hill—and the hounds divided upon them. With the latter a few couple went away on a scent that prevented their ever being caught till they reached John o' Gaunt, then two or three more and the field started after them, and the rest eventually followed. The pace was tremendous and the country terrible, being chiefly plough, and intersected here and there by ravines that not even a pigsticker could cross. Lord Calthorpe and Mr. Palk alone got on something like terms with the hounds after they had surmounted the Tilton Hill. After this, the line, having just avoided John o' Gaunt, led almost everyone to be entrapped by the Marfield Brook, here unjumpable. The hounds then bore right round to the right, the remainder of the field got choked at an awkward place in an oxer above Marfield, which could only be got over

with a clear gangway ; and so it fell out that the two Messrs. Chaplin, and afterwards the huntsman and Mr. Pryor, rode back with the hounds to Owston Village—the two journeys averaging some fifteen to twenty minutes each. West's horse was now so beat he could give little assistance to the pack, and their fox gained Owston Wood in safety after they checked at the village.

A little incident on the way home—Fallen Nimrod with muddy shoulders and a long bloody spur-mark up his horse's ribs. To him loquitur Rustic, " You've staked your horse, master ? " Nimrod, with unwilling waggers, " No, that's where I've been holding on with the spurs." " Be it now ? Well, by the look o' your coat, I reckon you'll want two pair next time ! " from which it may be gathered that Rusticus decidedly scored.



SEASON 1873-74.

KIRBY GATE.



THE Quorn at Kirby Gate.—Reader, if it has never been your lot to attend at Kirby Gate on the first Monday in November, you have doubtless (for of course you are a keen hunting man or woman) your own opening meet. And as summer passed by, and autumn was ushered in, imagination has assisted memory in daily piling on brighter and brighter colours, till the picture stood out a glowing harvest scene of anticipation. Not that the first day of the season is often

signalised by great success of venery; on the contrary, at least as far as Kirby Gate is concerned, the sport itself often does not rise above mediocrity. But it is as a reunion of cheery companionship, a renewal of happy association, and a glad ceremony to usher in the coming season, that it is chiefly looked forward to. I can think of no exact parallel with which to compare it; but it is as much to Melton as the Carnival is to Rome, more than the Commemoration is to Oxford. No class is brought into more intimate and daily contact than men hunting in the same district, unless it be men serving in the

same regiment ; and no body of men can be more widely scattered during the rest of the year. This is especially the case with the [members of the Melton Hunt (so called). They flock in with the winter from every imaginable quarter and corner ; they spend the day in each other's company so regularly, that an absentee is as certainly discovered as if a roll was called. They join heart and soul in the one pursuit, exchanging a thousand kindly offices, till there cannot but be a strong bond linking them together ; each year the greeting becomes warmer, and the meeting more keenly anticipated. Then when the swallows return, they fly away again, scattering far and wide to their several occupations or diversions. The questions, "Where have you been ?" and "What have you been doing ?" are alone enough to find conversational food for the first week of fresh intercourse. Many men have gathered in from the North ; several have been taking their turn of guard at St. James's—or, indeed, doing "sentry go" over the whole of deserted and fashionable London during the last three dreary months. One man has been to Vienna, will explain German policy all the way to covert, and lecture on Japanese pottery all the way home ; another has been at the seaside with the young entry—but he has less to say for himself than anyone, except the unfortunate who has been spending his summer, and prostituting his intellect, in teaching Cardwell's young ideas how to shoot.

But here at Kirby Gate, on this lovely autumn morning, are they all again—at least the main body of them, for some drop in later on, and so, by accident or intent, avoid the extra perils of the opening month. For Leicestershire in November is as blind as Justice, as intricate, if not as mirth-provoking, as the Tichborne case—certes, if we had not just returned from a trip to Bob Chapman and the city he takes under his wing, we had been fined a hunter's worth for contempt of court ! Some few have been in time for the last week or so of cubhunting, to put in person the finishing touches on their studs, and to get a feel of the saddle before commencing the campaign. But most

of them have arrived only just in time to give out breeches, tapes, and spur straps, and look round the stable. On Friday and Saturday they came trooping down by mail, express, and even special, while neither man nor beast of the Leicester fly-owners could call Sunday a day of rest. Thus on Monday there was a larger muster of faces familiar and distinguished than Kirby Gate has seen for years. Good news flies nearly as fast as ill (for is it not sought after, while the other is shunned?), and so it would seem that everybody had heard it said that the country was full of foxes, that the farmers one and all would swear by Mr. Coupland, and that the grass was soft and springy as indiarubber. At any rate, there turned up such a goodly company of landowners and birds of passage, of old friends and brilliant riders, that one's mind picture for once fell flat and dull-coloured beside reality. There were two points, though, about the assemblage that it was impossible not to notice, and which at first thought were very difficult to reconcile. One was, that a marvellous majority of the regulars were there to time; the other was, that not a stranger of notability (we except the two or three who had ridden from long distances) was present. But the foreign contingent and the recruits seldom fall into the ranks so early; and, if it is to be as in other years, and we may augur from the commencement, we shall have a larger force than ever in the field by Christmas. Already there is scarcely a stall—still less a house—to be had in Melton; there is such prospect before us as few can remember at any previous inauguration—a country brimming over with the raw material, and bound to a master who has worked himself into popularity among all classes, who has built up a pack of hounds that will do credit to the Hunt, and who has brought out a huntsman—(well, we shall have lots of chances of telling of him unless very different to the same man last year); plenty of wet in the ground; everything, in fact, to—

Announce a season potent to renew,
Bar frost and snow, the instinctive joys of sport,
And nobler cares than listless summer knew.

We have taken the liberty of altering two small words of Mr. Wordsworth's MS., but the poet's spirit can scarcely deem it an act of vandalism to give his muse a November instead of a September turn.

" Well," you may say, " tell us who was at the meet, and we can judge for ourselves if the Melton world is at home ! " But, I would answer, to give a complete list of names requires a notebook ; and a man making notes in the hunting field would be as much out of place as a money-lender in a mess room. Let me, however, jot down a few from memory, beginning as courtesy demands : Lady Evelyn Coventry, Mrs. Candy, Mrs. Chaplin, Mrs. C. Chaplin, Mrs. Tempest, Miss Hartopp, Miss Westenra, and one or two other ladies, were riding—and some of them prepared to ride very hard too, in defiance of the unpropitious state of the fences ; while there were several bright carriagefuls to soften the miscellaneous ruggedness of the Leicester caravans. Of the less loveable sex there were captains many of merit and renown, to wit, Capts. Coventry, Farley, Boyce, Atkinson, Riddell, Tempest, Candy, Barker, King, Barclay, Stirling, Campbell, Fludyer, Leonard, &c. Also Lord Helmsley, Messrs. Hartopp, Cheney, Barclay, Major Paynter, Messrs. Brooks, W. and E. Chaplin, Paget, &c. (Lord and Lady Grey de Wilton did not take the field till Wednesday; neither did the Messrs. Behrens, Capt. Smith, and Mr. Delacour.)

The chief point of incident at the meet was the presentation of a very handsome horn to Mr. Coupland by the earth-stoppers of the hunt. It will be remembered that the same body presented Mr. Musters with a whip on a like occasion, five seasons ago—and no slight compliment may such an act be deemed. Moreover, it is a most significant index of the existing state of the country. As on the former occasion, a speech in good honest Leicestershire was delivered by a patriarchial earth-stopper, and responded to by the Master. The former testified to the kindly and grateful feeling of their body towards Mr. Coupland, and the latter replied that it was truly the proudest

moment of his life—a sentiment that anyone who knows the persevering earnestness he has thrown into his work can well believe. This was succeeded by lusty three times three, which set the horses dancing, and imbued the hounds with a belief that a lot of foxes must be in their midst which everyone could see but themselves. By the way, the present pack is an *extraordinary* improvement on that of two years ago. But very few of the old hounds are left. Blood and breeding are manifest in a marked degree; and they strike the eye at once as a fashionable pack. As the day advanced they showed to still better advantage, working in good style and well under control.

Gartree Hill is by old-established custom the first draw of the season, and the orthodox move was accordingly made. Mr. Hartopp invariably responds liberally to the compliment, and now had three or four foxes awaiting the visit. They were soon away with one in the Melton direction, and the rascal at once placed the blindest and most trappy of fences between himself and the crowd of *débutants*. Men may conceal their thoughts as much as they like—even to deceiving themselves—but I notice (nor shame to assert) that we none of us drive at our first fence of the season with the dash that a quick start from covert demands; and some of the best men in England take a whole day or two to shake into their proper form. Add to this that in the present instance it was a matter of purest guess work to determine where the ditch began or the fence ended, which was grass and which were brambles, that horses were pulling riders out of their saddles with the mad freshness of a summer's idleness, and that the jump lay at the bottom of a steep decline, and you can believe there was some little hovering on the brink. Nor did the crash, crash, crash of steed after steed entrapped add extra charm to the situation. At least six were down; and a perfect *feu de joie* of muttered prayers ran along the line, as safety was assured only after grievous scrambling.

The sport was not of a character sufficient to dwell upon.

They soon brought their cub back to Gartree Hill, and took him away again for a few minutes' pleasant gallop in much the same direction. He then went to ground ; was bolted in the midst of a frightful thunder and hail storm, which in five minutes wetted everyone to the skin, and drove horses into a desperate state of terror ; and was soon afterwards hunted to his death.

As the afternoon cleared up, and the sun came out warm and bright to assist the sherry flasks in restoring circulation to shivering forms, hounds were taken to Adam's Gorse for a second draw. Formerly they seldom found here, but to-day the "old lady on the white horse" of nursery memory might have been riding with them, for there was music wherever they went ; and no sooner were the hounds in than they set up an uproar that started foxes from the little place like rabbits bolted from a burrow. There were three, if not four, in it, and they broke away in all directions one after another. There was not a good scent, so they could only hunt one slowly by Great Dalby, to lose him at Gartree Hill. Still there was houndwork to watch and fences to jump ; and the cheerful prospects that had been brought out sent everyone home in the sweetest of tempers.

A SCURRY OVER THE MELTON STEEPLE-CHASE COURSE.

If the Cottesmore began well on Tuesday (Nov. 4), they thoroughly confirmed their form on the Saturday following with as good a day's sport as is often seen. The present season has indeed opened with unexampled *éclat* on all sides—every pack having shown sport, and each day being productive of something enjoyable ; while the state of the ground is everything that can be desired for riding and hunting purposes.

From Leesthorpe on Saturday the Cottesmore took time by the forelock, and late comers on the rough side of their tempers, by starting off to Stapleford Park to the first stroke of eleven ; and before the half-hour, foxes by twos and threes, and rabbits by hundreds, were scuttling hither and thither through the park. But the real business began when a fox went away in view from what is known as the Cottage Plantation on the far side of the domain. The half-mile across the flat was won by the hounds, who issued into the road before the leading horsemen clattered through the stable-yard, and then succeeded half-a-mile of macadam, more in keeping with the chase of the lordly stag. As they neared Laxton's Covert the body of the pack got entangled by the park railings, while two couple struck away at lightning speed to the right ; and the run was only saved by the quick and clever policy of Jack West. With a promptness of decision that would have settled the Ashantee question he begged Captain Coventry to gallop on and keep the leading hounds in sight, while he himself extricated the others and followed in pursuit. A cold clear wind and a rising glass had brought such a scent that it was all the former could do to fulfil his mission, though sitting down to ride as if at Aintree ; but he *did* just succeed, and the huntsman cutting in with the rest of the pack at Berry Gorse, they sped on with unabated fire. Another mile of the deep ground of the Burton Flat was enough to set every horse gasping, and scarcely capable of even the small fences hereabout, for the pace had been absolutely awful. Captain Coventry's horse was so blown by his philanthropic exertions that, good hunter as he is, he gave him a fall that at least frightened everyone else, if the gallant captain himself made light of it, while the steed lay for five minutes completely pumped out. This incident stopped most of the leading men, and the hounds flew on almost unattended ; till passing by the lower end of Wheatlands they entered the Punchbowl. The straight line of road running parallel to the chase had now allowed a larger body of pursuers to concentrate ; but the pause here was so slight that there was scarcely time

to round the hill-top ere the pack were moving on over it. Horses had just gained their second wind as they were called to stretch themselves out again; and dipping (and slipping) down the face of the natural grandstand, they found themselves, for the second time in one week, competing in a "red-coat race" over the Melton Steeplechase ground—as if to testify to its right to be called the most sporting course in England. Honest flying fences, big enough to extend a good hunter, and turf as springy as a diving-board, with hounds running as fast as if they realised the honour of going over such ground. Swinging along under the far hill, they are taking the beaten track fence for fence. But if Captain Riddell knows that many of these easy-looking jumps are normally strong ox fences, all of those behind him do not; and, though he puts the steam on and sweeps wide over a rasper, his three followers drop on the far rail with a crash that might have been heard in Melton. The sight as they rose the hill was quite the fox-chase of the old brown beer jug—fox, hounds, and horsemen all close at each other—the first-named dead beat, but struggling on like a lion-hearted one, hounds bristling along within fifty yards of his brush, and the field eagerly pressing forward to view the worry. But the "brilliant finish" was denied—as in practice it almost invariably is, a kill being much more frequent after an indifferent run than a first-rate one. Their fox gained on them at the hedgerow and slipped over the next small inclosure into Adam's Gorse with his furry coat intact; while the babel of "tallyhos" and hound music started a fresh one from the little covert before the hounds entered. Taking his line up at once, they ran on fast as ever to Burdett's Covert (by way of Burrough Hill), where the sport may be said to have ended, for they did nothing after leaving it again. Up to this point could not have been less than forty-five minutes—though it may have been a trifle more—and throughout there was nothing that could be termed a check. The first part was *too* fast for hunters, particularly in early November, and second horses were never more

welcome than when it came to climbing Burrough Hill a second time.

GAY NOVEMBER.

NOVEMBER 14.—At this time of the year there are many warm little nooks much patronised by the blessed varmint, especially those whose early cubhood has been passed “in the open,” as distinct from those reared in the large coverts. Finding themselves routed out of these places, and the surrounding country well scoured, foxes will take refuge in the orthodox fastnesses, there to be called upon at pleasure. But if left till the brambles have lost their leaves, and the cold blasts of Christmas sweep from end to end of the small copses, they probably betake themselves to the nearest hedgerow that will offer shelter—of no good in their generation or that of their progeny, but making their race hateful by their farmyard depredations, and often even marring sport by jumping up while a run is proceeding. Indeed, outlying foxes are worse than useless: they are actively harmful to the cause of fox-hunting, and deserve little grace when a chance occurs of stopping their iniquities. A farmer who has seen many changes in the Quorn Hunt, and whose memory dates back beyond the arrival of the oldest of existing Meltonians, was recounting but a few days ago how, in Sir Harry Goodricke’s time, Will Derry ran such a fox “unmerciful hard,” till he took refuge, “the big coward,” in a hen-roost, which he had doubtless often visited on a different errand. “Pull him out!” says Sir Harry. “Let ‘em worry him! Such a one as him’s no good to nobody.”

On Saturday (November 15), Burton Overy drew together all who could reach it. We may pass over the first run (from Glenn Gorse) altogether; for lack of scent, plenitude of hares, and a general overboiling of ardour prevented its being worthy of the good country travelled over. Suffice to say that when

it ended Thurnby Spinney was found to be near at hand. The holding power of this little place being more in proportion to its owner's majestic castle, hard by, than its own apparent insignificance, every eye and ear was on the *qui vive* when the hounds were put in, and coffee-housing had no chance among the keen throng that threw in their fortunes with Mr. Tailby.

From Thurnby Spinney to Scraptoft Gorse is but a short ten minutes when hounds go as straight and fast as they did now; but it was a pretty foretaste of still choicer morsels; and to skim down the one and up the other side of grassy valleys such as the Thurnby and Norton country can boast—fences fair and guileless, and the turf seeming to lift you along its surface—is always delight, however brief. Still more is it delight in November when you look for drawbacks—and this year, instead of drawbacks, find perfection. Men throw their hearts more fully and readily into the sport at first commencement than at any time, are more appreciative, and incline to view everything with the rosy spectacles which have served them in their forward gaze during the summer. There is a freshness and novelty about early sensation that with many people wears off only too rapidly as the season goes on. True, a *blasé* hunting man is an anomaly that at no time exists openly and avowedly; but an habitual grumbler is an object only one degree less pitiable, and he is a creature that, alas! does occasionally appear in the hunting field. However, spleen, discontent, and moroseness are none of them yet represented hereabouts, for every tongue is wagging gaily and daily on the bright aspect of the present, and each day there is fresh food for gratulation and discussion. Perfect weather, absolutely perfect condition of ground, and superlatively perfect supply of foxes; each Hunt in an equally good state, and each pack of rare stamp; good sport plentiful—nay, continual—and good-fellowship supreme. There, our panegyric is finished; but we rave not without cause; is there not method in our madness? Who shall blame that we are happy while

we may, and that we should say so ? We have had a growl, even a groan, in these pages before now ; who shall deny us the right to trumpet forth our triumphs ? for we speak only to appreciative ears, not to those of the cynical or unsympathetic.

But to get back to Scrattoft Gorse in time to hurry on again, this time over the Quorn country. It was the old familiar scene of a crush in the lane, hounds tearing over the one little stubble that bounds the Keyham grass, some men riding right, others riding left to avoid it, while a few only struck in with the pack. And, as we have seen over and over again, there was a sudden turn as the grass was reached, and one-half at least of a hard-riding field thrown off at a tangent. This time it was the half (and much larger half it was) who had held along the lane towards the Coplow ; and as Mr. Tailby twisted short to his left—boring through an overhanging bullfinch that threatened total separation from his pack—he was left almost alone in near pursuit. Now they skirted the deep Keyham Bottom, flying along at a pace that scarcely suited the necessity of the two greasy stiles in their course towards Barkby. Mr. Coleman joined the master as the first road was crossed ; then the dreaded bottom was threaded, its second passage leaving Mr. Tailby again alone with the pack. Just as Barkby Thorpe was imminent, their fox found himself so closely pressed that he gave it up, and bore round back for Scrattoft. He was now close in front, and it seemed odds on their pulling him down before he could reach the gorse. But within a field of it a fresh fox jumped up, and this distraction soon led to more complications, for from the long plantation they got into the laurels and set two or three more of the genus on foot. So the run ended harmlessly as the gorse was regained.

Monday (November 17) was the best day the Quorn has yet experienced. Before this they had enjoyed many pretty little spurts while waiting their turn for something better ; but on Monday Fortune smiled her blandest upon them. They met at Six Hills on a cold still morning, such as is welcomed only

by foxhunters, though for them it might have been made to order. They had only to travel a few hundred yards to be among a legion of foxes; for Thrussington this year is a perfect club, drawing-room, and nursery for whole vulpine families. They got away at the bottom of Thrussington Wolds with the first one—always half the odds in favour of a run—and started on good terms, with the fairest of countries in front. But three fields away he was headed and turned on to the ploughs towards Cossington; hounds had to put their noses down; disappointment seemed the only thing in store; and the faint-hearted gave up the gallop as lost. For half a mile the line was thus taken but slowly; when in a moment they turned off on to the grass, and plunged into the Hoby valley, lying temptingly on their left. How they sped over the turf of these fine old pastures; how they ran their fox into view at the end of the first quarter of an hour from now; and how for the next ten minutes men had to grapple with the Hoby and Ragdale oxers with blown horses (as they bore round again to Six Hills), wanted little more eloquence to tell than was conveyed in the perspiring faces and soiled scarlet of riders, and in the sobbing sides of steeds. No finer and at the same time no stiffer line than this could have been chosen. Captain Smith was cutting out most of the work, with Lord Helmesley, Mr. Coupland, and the huntsman on excellent terms. Several others were doing full justice to themselves and the good burst, but the field generally were rather widely scattered. Once again was the run fox saved by the help of fresh ones; for, as they once more neared the Thrussington coverts there were at least two others on foot before the hounds, and so their game escaped them.

Equally bad luck did they and the huntsman experience in the afternoon. This time the run began from Thrussington New Covert, in and out of which foxes had been moving all day like fowls from a barn. Starting with one from the north side, they followed him slowly over a villainous country round the back of Six Hills; but by perseverance hunted up to him

in Shoby Scholes. As happened in a similar instance two years ago, they set off again from here on greatly improved terms, and, streaming away fast over the brow beyond, descended straight upon the two Shoby bottoms of dreaded memory. A very feasible place was found where the first could be flown, though by no means pleasant as the plot thickened on its banks. But the second was a yawner—too wide to jump, and too steep to crawl ; in fact, the only chance was to flop hap-hazard into the mud, and trust to your horse's back and loins to scramble up the other side. Captain Candy first essayed it successfully, then Tom Firr, then two others, and the next comer remained in it, to the exclusion of further adventure in that direction. This difficulty surmounted, it became comparatively plain sailing, though it was only clever pilotage by which two gallant captains (both aforesaid) led the field out of disastrous difficulty by popping in and out of a little plantation of thick young firs. With quick good hunting over the grass they took their fox to Wartnaby, and here were in the same field with him. He could scarcely crawl up the hedgerow before them ; but just sufficient strength remained to him to creep out of their very jaws, and he got to ground in a drain under the farmyard above Saxelby Spinney. Here he had to be left after this good sporting run of something over an hour, when hounds and huntsmen had fully earned a final triumph. By the way, I should be very remiss if I left Mrs. Clifford Chaplin's riding on this day without a word of laudation ; for throughout both these severe runs she was taking every fence, and seeing all the sport.

THE QUORN IN LUCK.

THURSDAY, December 11.—Seldom in the annals of the hunt—never during my experience—has such a succession of grand sport fallen to the lot of the Quorn as during the week past.

Other packs have been having their share of success ; but the Quorn have had *more* than their share, and my task is no light one to record their triumphs alone. Such consistent sport as they have shown on consecutive days—*i.e.*, their hunting days—is something almost marvellous ; for, though all the good combinations of management, popularity, weather, and scent were in their favour, some good genius must have further imbued the hearts of their foxes with a desire to lend all the help they could. In short, they have seemed unable to draw a covert without the result of a good run with a good fox.

The first two days—Tuesday, December 2, and Thursday, December 4—I must cut short, and get my readers as soon as possible on to the more favoured side of the country. These, then, were fixed respectively for The Ruins at Bradgate Park, and Willoughby. On the former day assembled a vast concourse of men on foot, with a mixed multitude on horseback and in carriages ; and, apparently, there had been a strike in every factory in Leicester for the occasion. With a diplomacy, however, that deserved its success, Mr. Coupland made terms with them by promising that if they would restrain themselves from shouting and forbear from entering the coverts, he would do his best to kill a fox for them, otherwise he would be obliged to trot off to a distance. Galling as must have been the prohibition, they accepted and maintained their bargain honourably ; while a short-running fox enabled the master to fulfil his part to their loud satisfaction, and all hands, having been present at the kill and worry, went home delighted adherents of the national pastime. A second fox soon being found at Benscliffe Wood, they went away at once for a capital forest run, past the Beacon and round by Buck Hill and the Out Woods, right into Loughborough town, in about thirty-five minutes. The hounds here worked him dead beat through several gardens, when he met an inglorious end by crawling under a stick heap, from which some boys dislodged him, knocked him on the head, popped him into a bag, and carried him promptly off to be stuffed. The young ruffians even

refused the offer of a sovereign for their booty from a gentleman who met them *en route*; and hounds and huntsmen went away puzzled as to how their well-earned prey had escaped them. Equally unusual was an incident that took place two days later with the Cottesmore at Witham Wood. Having run a fox to ground in an old drain, they proceeded to bolt him with a terrier. Not only did they succeed in doing this, but the process of dislodgment extended to another brace; and all three, being hemmed in by the people on foot, unfortunately ran in among the hounds and were killed. More than this, there were still two others in the drain, who were ejected in safety. The three slain were all old foxes.

The Thursday at Willoughby was a bye-day, and was full of varied sport.

And now we come to Friday (December 25), when they met at Great Dalby, their farthest fixture from the Kennels. Of the morning itself it is enough to say that it was one of the most perfect specimens of the beautiful hunting days with which we have been indulged of late—a day on which the powers of sound, sight, and scent seem to enjoy their fullest liberty. Gartree Hill was the origin of the first event of the day. A few minutes in covert, and then a break away across the line of the eager expectant crowd—a crowd, not in the ordinary depreciatory sense of the term, but a chosen body of Meltonians, Tailbyites, with good sportsmen and hard riders from the hunts of Cottesmore and Belvoir. Two fields from Gartree Hill, as all the world may know, is a narrow belt of plantation, with two small handgates as its only passage. The hounds dashed through close to these; but 'twas only by surging, squeezing, and wriggling that the train of pursuers could issue through in their wake. Three fields more, and then came Sir Francis Burdett's covert to cause division and—to too many—dismay. It seemed Lombard-street to a china orange, or any less hackneyed but equally extravagant odds, on the fox having entered the stronghold—at least, so thought nine-tenths of the field, and by this calculation were thrown

out of the hunt. Both Custance and Capt. Smith however, have upset the long odds too often to leave a chance thrown away : so, clinging close to the hounds, they popped over into the plough, jumped the bottom below the covert, and galloped up by its side with the pack. Firr was well with them to note another instance of how seldom foxes care to halt in their course for the small artificial coverts of this country, and was there to turn with them when the line suddenly diverged to the right in passing the tempting thicket. Not so, however, the bulk of the good men and true in his wake, all equally anxious to be with hounds when running as now. They had made their certainty to the left, while fate and improbability chose this sudden turn to the right. Three neat fences, quick and sharp ; then a double gate, with an impracticable fence on either side, and Custance with a maimed arm, to fumble it open ; next a locked gate and a high-grown thorn that took a second look and hounds running faster than common to make it negotiable. Not even these brought it within the scope (or experience) of the huntsman's mare—good though she soon proved herself—and the usual result of such shortcoming followed. Into the road and out again, midway between Great Dalby and Gartree Hill, brought an uphill plough as a preparation for the strong country in front—and not a moment to breathe as they entered upon it. Hounds were running their best, and the trio had to gallop their hardest to keep them in sight. Ugh ! what a bullfinch ! It seemed not to loose its hold till they were strides into the next field. Such a scent was there that the pack were able to drive a flock of sheep before them—ay, and turn as they went—without checking a moment, as Firr reappeared ready to help them. So on for a couple of miles, good grass and good fences, till, bearing still to the right, their fox made his point at the drain under the Melton and Gartree road, where he had found safety a fortnight before. To-day, though, the refuge was closed against him, and he had to hold on—the body of unlucky ones now joining in pursuit ; and, with only a field to the good, and

at one moment only a single hedgerow, he struggled forward for the earths within hail of Melton. Here—where during the summer a whole clan, jealously guarded by sport-loving farmers who do honour to the district, could be seen playing any sunny eve, not a hundred yards from the Leicester turnpike road—he went to ground. Seven-and-twenty minutes from starting, and seven-and-twenty minutes of the best.

The second act contained but two scenes, Thorpe Trussells the first, and the second an open drain a field or two away. But Act III. of the day's play was of a different stamp altogether. Opening at Cream Gorse rather late in the afternoon, it was played on with growing interest till darkness compelled actors and spectators to resign their parts unfinished. To drop the symbolic, this was a chase which, commencing languidly and unpromisingly, was gradually worked into as fine and sporting a hunting run as imagination could plan, wanting only a quarter of an hour of daylight for a finish that would have given it a life's memory. A shepherd dog coursed the principal character at starting, turned him['] from his course, and drove him exactly where the owner of the said shepherd dog was endeavouring to prevent his going. So it took a quarter of an hour to mark him beyond Thorpe Trussells, and another quarter of an hour to track him over the Twyford Brook (midway between Twyford and Ashby Folville), including the time occupied in the breaking of rails, repeated refusals of unwilling steeds urged by bolder riders, and the subsequent fording of the stream *en masse*. It took quite five minutes to traverse two fields of wheat; but either their fox must have waited for them, or there must be some strange scenting properties in the strong old grass beyond, for, once arrived upon it, they hit off the line, and thence continued running almost uninterruptedly till darkness closed upon them. And such a country now! Nothing but turf a generation old, and fences built that no bullock should bore his way through them. No racing this time, but an hour's steady cantering, galloping, and jumping that nothing under two summers' condition could

live through. Hunting better and quicker over every field, hounds moved merrily and continuously on over the superb country between Twyford and Loseby, offering a study of beautiful hunting that forced into each man an interest as if he himself were carrying the horn. Thus on over the Marfield Brook—a fair clean jump that had no terrors for Mrs. Featherstonhaugh on her steeplechasing black. Indeed, she and Miss Hartopp maintained their pride of place to the very end of this severe run.

John o' Gaunt was now imminent in front ; but apparently their fox had lost himself, and, turning off again within a field or two of it, bore down upon the Twyford Brook, at the very spot where so many exciting scenes had been enacted in the oft-repeated bursts from John o' Gaunt to Burrough—and exactly where such sore grief was destined to take place on the following Cottesmore Tuesday. To-day there were but few accidents in surmounting the difficulty—perhaps because a large proportion of the field had slightly overshot the mark, and found themselves opposite a happy ford. Be this as it may, there were numbers yet to ride with the hounds as they passed Burrough village (leaving it just to the right), and dipped with increasing speed on to the steeplechase course, which, as usual, was crossed at right racing pace. Up the hillside opposite the Stand—men now dropping behind to lead up the ascent, and eager at their fences, not for first turn, but last, and heartily thankful as one tired pair of hind legs after another trod down the obstructing binders. And so they struggled on, not half a dozen having power to join the chase as it rounded Great Dalby village (half-way to Gartree Hill), and moved on towards Melton. The horses of huntsman and whip were still equal to their fences ; Lord Grey de Wilton's, Capt. Boyce's, Col. Forester's, and Capt. Smith's seemed almost fresh as ever, though the last two had been ridden all day ! But the now helpless majority were glad enough to stand on Dalby Hill and watch the hounds come round to the Melton-road, there to join them again, and make the best of gates and gaps to learn the

finish. This finish, however, only came in the shape of darkness; for, when at Guadeloupe Farm (some two miles from Melton) their fox was crawling in the same field with them, it was found impossible to do more in the obscurity, and the hounds were taken home. Up to the point where they ceased to run well the time was an hour and thirty minutes, the last hour being fairly fast throughout. Altogether it was a wonderful instance of a fine run being made out of a most indifferent beginning; for they had hunted up until they placed themselves on good terms with their fox, and were able to show off the grandness of the line to full advantage. To recount such a run is more pleasure to the writer recalling it than he can possibly hope it to be to those who read—unless they too find a charm in bringing memory to bear upon such an event. And undoubtedly they must do; for look at men after they have really enjoyed such a day as this. They go home in a state of mind that would almost justify them in standing on their heads, or dancing a hornpipe on the dinner-table. There is not one of them but would raise the glass of good companionship to his worst enemy, and forgive him as freely as Mr. Jorrocks did Pigg after the Cat and Custard-pot day. It is the memory of days like these that sends one daily to covert, full of hope and anticipation, in spite of a thousand disappointments. It is this feeling that holds foxhunting so far above staghunting, with all its daily gallops; and, happily, there is an elasticity about the sentiment, or the minds of the men on whom it acts, that prevents a reverse result producing the opposite effect of ill-temper or despondency. Truly, “Life so varied hath more loveliness in one day than a creeping century of sameness;” and so we treasure up such occasional draughts of enjoyment, and by aid of memory eke it out again to sweeten scenes of dulness and monotony. I may be set down as ecstatic—but this I do say, that when a “hunting man” commences to divest hunting of its halo of poetry, he not only robs it at once of half its fascination to himself, but gives the surest sign that he is “training off,” and that his

love of sport is decaying. And then surely and certainly he will find—

Cold calculating thoughts succeed,
With timid doubt and wary deed.
Back on the past he turns his eye,
Remembering with an envious sigh
The bolder feats of youth.

Passing over Saturday with the Cottesmore—which, though a lovely hunting day, contained only a quick twisting gallop of fifteen minutes to ground from Ranksboro’—we have to deal with Monday last, Dec. 9th, a day almost if not quite as good as the one above.

The Quorn were at Ragdale Old Hall, a meet that on a bright morning like this produces a prettier picture than almost any fixture in the hunt. I venture no attempt at painting it, though; but will get on at once to Shoby Scholes, which this year fully takes the place of Lord Aylesford's covert, at present under renovation. The first fox was baulked in his early attempt, and, still more unfortunate in his next, was shortly devoured; but a second one was away almost immediately, over the same line as on the last occasion here, and with him they had an excellent half-hour's burst. Crossing the two bugbear Shoby bottoms—one of Mr. E. Hartopp's late stud bringing his Meath experience to bear in piloting over both—he led them over the grass towards Asfordby at a tremendous pace. Then, throwing them out for just half a minute's welcome breathing time, he turned to the left, passed close to Saxelby village, and circled Saxelby Wood, without caring to touch it. The hounds covered the three fields of plough almost as quickly as they had the grass, and, again, embarking on good turf (bounded, too, by the sweetest of flying fences), ran straight for Welby Fishponds. Half a mile from it, the fox was in view but a field before them; but, turning sharp under a hedgerow, their halfhour's gallop was over. The holloas resounding back were *not* upon the run fox; for they not only traced him into Welby Fishponds, but took him for a short ring from there. But whether it was a fresh one

or not, with whom they again started and rattled famously by the outskirts of Wartnaby village into Holwell Mouth, there eventually to kill him, it is impossible to say. Certain it is, though, that when killed he was as stiff after death as only a sorely run fox could be.

It was as late as ten minutes past three when Grimston Gorse was drawn, in presence of a field select as keen ; and at a quarter past a stout fox made good his exit on the Old Dalby side. Accordingly everybody, except Captain Molyneux, who preferred a line of stiles to the left, went up the bridle road for the wood. The hounds, however, turned sharp round the village of Grimston ; and, all hands reunited, went on again over the grass feeding grounds beyond. Running fast and well over a stiffer line even than in the morning, they crossed the Saxelby Bottom—fortunately where fence and stream could be negotiated separately—then leaving Welby Fishponds a field or so to the right, plunged on into the Duke's country. Old Hills was left a little outside their line ; and then, getting on to the plough, they had to slacken the pace (more than a hunting one) at which they had now been going for more than half an hour. Dusk set in as they neared the Melton Brook, and darkness was so far present when they jumped it at ten minutes past four, that water was indistinguishable from weeds. It was jumped, though, by some six or seven people; and among them was a lady, Mrs. Clifford Chaplin (I should apologise for a second mention of her name so soon, did not such a feat proclaim its own praise.) They pressed on still, not half a field from Melton Spinney ; and with the fences every moment becoming more matters of happy chance, and hounds now out of view when a hundred yards ahead, they took a leap in the dark into the Brentingby Brook, and groped their way upwards for Brentingby Spinney. How unearthly must Tom's cheer have sounded to the "lated peasant" of Thorpe Arnold ! And how it must have seemed to him that the Wilde Jäger of Bürger was scouring the country, as the "wild din invades his ears," with nothing visible or human to account for it !

Oh, for another quarter of an hour of daylight! again groaned forth master, huntsman, and field, as once more they succumbed to darkness, and whipped off the hounds at 4.25. Thus they had been running for an hour and ten minutes, during which time I do not remember the hounds to have been once lifted. The distance from point to point was nearly six miles; and the Master, Lord Grey de Wilton, Capt. King, Messrs. Ernest Chaplin and Samuda, were all who went on to the end. A splendid day's sport it was indeed; and a fit sequence to the good Friday preceding. It is only just to say that Tom Firr never shone to greater advantage than on these days—a living instance that a grass country *need* not spoil a promising huntsman, as so many people insist. And, superbly as Mr. Coupland always mounts his men, they never seem to have been so well carried as this season.

Such have been the doings of the Quorn, followed up on Tuesday in like form by the Cottesmore, who, from Little Dalby Laurels (there are Dalbies enough in the country to confuse a stranger, or even a sojourner of two years' standing, but it is Little Dalby which boasts the squire who gives us sport so good and frequent), hunted over Burrough Hill, and then drove their fox straight away over the grass for twenty minutes to ground. They went almost exactly over the ground of part of the Quorn run on Friday, passed close by Burrough village, filled the Twyford Brook till it almost choked with men and horses, and, keeping to the right of John o' Gaunt, stopped below the earths at Springfield Spinneys. Colonel Forester, Lord Carington, and Custance were leading over the steeplechase course, and were prominent members of the first half-dozen over the brook in question.

Once, and once only, have I had to relate such a week of sport. This was last winter, when for eight days run succeeded run on every side. But then we could only just struggle through the mud, and our horses could hardly drag their tired limbs along after a mile or two. Now we have been riding over grass that would scarcely soil a satin shoe: indifferent

horses have seemed almost wonders in their powers of galloping and jumping ; and we have forgotten all about the discomforts of rain and mud, and better still, of wind.

CHRISTMASTIDE, 1878.

WHAT kind of Christmas does one hunting-man invoke for another, as he grasps his hand and bids him merriment and happiness ? Surely his mind's eye is not fixed upon the hoary icicle-hung figure of conventional Christmastide, with its attendant miseries ? He does not mean to wish his friend imprisonment and inaction ; possible over-indulgence, with its consequent gout or ill-temper ; fretfulness, roused by brooding over the butcher's bill, or pangs of conscience begotten of examination of stable accounts. The lower class may, perhaps, in these days of democracy and high wages, be generally as well able to buy coal as they of bluer blood. But still there must be humble homes where cold weather and a fireless grate mean anything but a merry time ; and surely the knowledge of such scenes is not what we wish one another. No, the face of *our* Father Christmas is an evergreen, warm, and kindly one, that smiles upon our open air, fosters manhood and sport, and favours the cheery fellowship of the field. Some good folks have been murmuring for what they call "seasonable Christmas weather," even though the sun has been shining daily and brightly, a mild, spring-like zephyr breathing softly upon them, and the roads clean as if swept for their convenience. Well, let them ! This has been *our* Merry Christmas, and heartily and thankfully we have welcomed it. More perfect and delightful weather than we have had it would be impossible to conceive, and everything else has conduced to our present happy mode of celebrating the season. We may live and hunt for years (a possibility that naturally takes the form of a prayer) ; but we can scarcely hope to see such a peerless early season

again, any more than we can look back upon its like. For two months we have had sport almost incessant, and oftentimes superlatively brilliant. We have had but one tiny stoppage under "the tyrannous breathing of the north," an acceptable breathing time, too, which "shook our buds from growing" for four days only. The ground has been ever warm to carry a scent and firm against hoof pressure, with autumn rains still latent under the surface to maintain its properties and qualities. And save on occasions marked and solitary, there has been a blessed absence of that baneful foe, wind, so that even on days dubbed indifferent, as measured by their standard of sport, it has been pleasant to hunt. Nor can I see a single drawback to such a balmy open season, even by casting aside the cloak of selfishness, and donning that of charity. Besides, you can make merry, you can eat and drink your fill as becomes the occasion just as freely at such time as if surrounded by frost and snow. Nay, rather you have a present constant source of merriment and converse—a common thrilling subject of interest and excitement to maintain hilarity. Nor is it a mean consideration that even the most combined attack of Moet and Lafitte will fall powerless, when a man is doing his seven hours daily in the saddle. That the New Year may follow worthily in the steps of its predecessor is the best we wish it; but even should its infancy be petulant or fanciful, we can still withhold a grumble till tired of reflecting on the immediate past.

Boxing Day in Leicestershire was held in Baggrave Hall, and as universally attended as if by conscription. So far from attempting to say who was present, I would ask the question, "Who was absent?" Certainly no one of small or great degree, from within a radius of a dozen miles, who could raise or share a quadruped. I have seen large meets of the Quorn before, many Fridays, and some few Christmas gatherings; yet never have I seen such an army—such a census I may almost say—as to-day, when the horsemen exceeded a half thousand, and vehicles brought their hundreds into action. A kindly multitude it was, though, assembled, high and low, with

but two unanimous objects—to support hunting and to work off the evil physical effects of yesterday's commemoration. It was almost such another crowd as came here two years ago to welcome the Prince of Wales, and see him turn the first sod of the gorse which was to give us so many grand gallops. Now, however, they had to rely on their own society, and the enjoyment each in his respective way expected from the hunting itself.

To do any good at the little Baggrave coverts was an impossibility, with such hosts of people surrounding it, and the neighbouring hill sides clustered over like so many disturbed ant-hills. Truly, this might have been a farewell pleasure excursion for Mr. Arch's ten thousand emigrant labourers; or else the farmers hereabouts had with one accord shut up their ploughs, and left their sheep unfed for the day. So, after giving the community half an hour to scrutinise the hounds, and pass seasonable sentiment, Mr. Coupland moved off on a more distant war trail, fixing upon Scraughton Gorse, as least amenable to a wheeled invasion, and distant enough to make it inaccessible to the pedestrian throng. Still, there was an enormous field in attendance, such a field as made the prospect of sport apparently hopeless, albeit it was a perfect hunting day, quiet and cold. And yet, in the event the day was as full of varied amusement as a scrap book; for there were two nice little bursts, hundreds of fences for the hundreds of horsemen, numberless charming incidents thereat, while Firr contrived to work out a capital hunting run, by moving perseveringly beyond the skirts of his clouds of followers.

The first fox of the day seemed to drop from the clouds, for he was not seen to leave the long spinney adjoining the covert, till he crossed right in front of the hounds. As was natural, the latter were prompt to avail themselves of the advantage, and set off after him at a pace that made the deep ridge-and-furrow of the first field an agony. How horses must, and do, always hate this hateful relic of ancient agriculture! Nothing kills their pluck, or chokes their lungs, like being

called upon to plunge and rise at top speed against these chopping seas of turf. Many old sportsmen tell us we ought never to breast them, but to take them on the slant. No doubt we ought, if we have got the whole of the next fence to pick and choose from, with hounds settled down and our start assured. But it is a doctrine impossible to practise, when riding for bare life (or, next thing to it, a start), and you have to reach a necessary gate or gap in good time, or submit to be blocked altogether out of your run. Perhaps hounds did not go so fast in former days—at all events there were no such crowded fields to contend against as now. The men of this generation have long since laid it down as a maxim (practising it too strongly, on occasions, perhaps), that one field of real galloping at starting will often save half a dozen afterwards; and bitter experience must tell one of the heartbreaking effects of a careless or dilatory course at such a time.

This first gate reached and passed, the chase opened out over a good grass country, where there was room for everybody; but the pace was so tremendous that there was soon little danger of jostling or being jostled. The quickest were yet some distance behind the hounds, in spite of every effort to get on terms; those next to them were glad to take their pilotage in immediate succession; while the body of pursuers lengthened out like a huge comet, with the Christmas element as its tail, growing broader and longer as it went. For ten minutes hounds ran marvellously fast; then, crossing the brook at the back of Barkby Thorpe (by no means a comfortable jump), reached the village in another five.

A fresh fox jumping up in the open caused some confusion for a time; but the real object getting up again in view, the run was carried on over an almost unknown country, and good hunting ensued for nearly an hour. First they left the land of grass and took a survey of the flat "enterpriseless" district near Syston, making a close reconnaissance of the scene of the railway accident, and bringing the holiday-makers back for an inspection of the beautiful Queniborough Spire. Having

shown them some of the existing lions of the neighbourhood, they treated them to an insight of the true character of the Quorn country by leading them steadily and carefully over the nice pastures alongside the Gaddesby brook. The hunt was pronounced over at Queniborough Spinney, and a halt called for luncheon purposes. At this period they in the carriages had perhaps the best of it—though, truth to tell, no one who brings out a second horseman need nowadays lack a midday meal of luxury that our Spartan sires would have pronounced unquestionably culpable, for the so-called sandwich cases to be seen strapped on the backs of many liveried light weights want very little growth to give them a second use as portmanteaus. “Chicken and ham? No. A mutton pie, then, or just a slice of cold plum pudding?” Such is the very pleasant style of hospitality in vogue at the covert-side in this latter half of the nineteenth century; and long may it last—at any rate, so long as it is given unto us to pursue. The “liquor question,” however, still remains a vexed one—not as regards a means of bringing it into the field at the right moment or in requisite quantity, but as to the most desirable and least objectionable form. The advocates of sherry are crushed by a reference to its acknowledged acidity. Brandy-and-water is pronounced insipid. Port is harmless, but detestable when one is really thirsty, and ever a *bête noire et terrible* to the gentlemen whose office is to keep leathers spotless. Brandy-and-soda has been tried of late and met with varied approval; the chief objection to it being that if your second horseman were to get a fall, the effect of the concussion might be an explosion, costing you new livery and a fresh servant. Champagne has been tested; but as, after undergoing an agitating process for some hours in close proximity to an animal mass generating much heat, it is found to assume a character widely differing from Byron’s idolised liquid, this too has been discarded. Whisky-and-water is much patronised; but, after all, every man, as is quite proper, holds to his own especial fancy, and maintains it accordingly—just as he does his universal

pattern of bridle, his plan of shoeing, and his cut of coat. One gentleman has invented a new compound, with a novel name, and one of which we would rather accept a pull after a dip in the Whissendine or a crumpler over Skeffington than anything we know; but its ingredients are as secret as the building of that wondrous cravat we also wot of (which abolishes collar and scarf). To betray either might be the loss of a life's friendship, or, at least, of such sacred confidences in the future.

But this letter was intended neither as an addendum to Routledge's "Dainty Drinks," nor as a Christmas contribution to "Food and its Uses;" so let us get back to *venerie* proper.

The Quorn to-day, Monday, January 5th, 1874, have wrought a happy omen out of the opening day of the new year, in a proper sequence to their late successes and a fitting prelude to the coming spring. By the way, why should we consider a new year such a matter of rejoicing? Each succeeding one is another unit jotted off our youth and freshness; each lessens the prospective which is half the joy of life; and each one makes it more patent that new associations can never fill up the place of ties displaced. However, this is not the time for a course of reasoning more in keeping with a forced absence from present scenes or a bed-compelling sickness. If harassed by such thoughts, let me tell you of a perfect cure. Go and place yourself where you have just seen a fox stealing across the main ride of Walton Thorns, and get two yards to leeward of Tom Firr as he cheers them to the cry. If it doesn't make a boy of you, it will make you an old woman on the spot. You must either stiffen in your saddle with concentrated excitement, or you must turn round and cry over your dotage. *Huic! huic!! huic!! Yo-oi! a'at him there, old bitches! Yo'o'i!!* (Santley hasn't a note approaching it.)

QUICK IN AND OUT OF A FROSTY LANE.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 8TH.

CAPITAL sport and excellent fun again, in spite of the queer vacillating policy pursued by the weather—frost and thaw setting in alternately with equal strength and suddenness. To get to the Quorn meet at Widmerpool Inn on Monday entailed such a pilgrimage of peril, that many usually bold-hearted succumbed on the way. It was only by hugging the hedge-sides that you could make progress at all, the roads being rinks of the smoothest and most unbroken description, on which your horse would skate for some lengths, then stop and tremble for very helplessness. The turf, however, carried no signs of frost beyond a few thin snow-flakes here and there, while the plough soon softened to the sunshine. Roehoe covert was empty after the death chorus that had stirred its depths on the Thursday previous. Kinoulton was in the unsparing hands of the woodmen ; and then the little field were taken off to a spot that probably none of them had ever heard of—a one-acre plantation called Kinoulton Lime-kiln. A canal bounds two sides of it ; and on the towing-path of this the group huddled themselves, so that rapid exit was impossible. These diminutive coverts are what huntsmen delight in—so long as elbow-room is given by the field ; for hounds can slip away close at their fox, which is nine points out of ten for a run and a kill, at least with the stout varmint of this country. So now a fox was out and away over the Belvoir Vale as soon as the hounds were in. They were away almost as soon as he was ; while the riders were put a hundred yards or so to the bad at once. Kinoulton village was barely a mile away, but as they crossed the road close by it, the fox had gained but a field on the pack, who in their turn had still further improved their vantage on the horsemen—Tom Firr, on a galloper, nearest in pursuit ; Capt. Barker, Messrs. Hassall and Samuda, and Mr. Little Gilmour pressing hard to better their positions. The last-

named, who was going like a youth and a feather-weight, was afterwards heard to say that, even in his long experience, he had never seen hounds fly along as they did now. To pop in and out of an icy road at such a pace was simply tempting Providence. Most of the leaders took a steady pull; but a rash four-year-old, refusing to take the office, paid the penalty by remaining hard and fast in the second ditch. A harmless series of summersaults took the hapless rider many yards further in the pursuit, and there he lay, sadly "moralising the spectacle," like Jaques and his wounded stag :—

"'Tis right," quoth he ; "thus misery doth part
The flux of company
Sweep on, you [gay and thrusting] citizens ;
'Tis just the fashion ; wherefore do you look
Upon this poor and broken bankrupt here ?"

Lest a spice of malice should appear to have suggested the quotation, let it be known that the broken bankrupt was none other than your unhappy contributor, thus fallen in the discharge of his onerous duties. But in Leicestershire a man is never in such case

Left and abandoned of a careless herd,
who,
Full of the pastime jump along by him,
And never stay to greet him :

so the parallel only holds partially good.

So tremendous was the pace, that twelve minutes of it was enough to burst up this fox. He lay down by a hayrick ; the hounds bristled past him, and, throwing up their heads beyond, gave him time to slip off again unseen. Soon, however, they were once more on his track, hunted up to him, and killed him in the open at the end of another quarter of an hour.

A LEICESTERSHIRE BURST (THE DOCTOR LEADS).

A SPLENDID specimen of a Leicestershire burst was the Quorn gallop of Friday, January 16th. Twenty-five minutes without a vestige of a check (thirty-two minutes, quick, in all) over a superb grass country, and hounds holding a trifle the best of their field from end to end. Such a run, in fact, as the *profanum vulgus* of the hunting world imagine to be an every-day occurrence in the Shires, but for which we who sojourn here often wait weeks, in ordinary seasons at all events—and *then*, perhaps, fail to see. Indeed, how many fine riders were there gathered at Great Dalby that morning? Some two hundred, all eager, well mounted, and capable; besides the numbers of lesser degree who go to make up even such a choice field as always muster there. And how many, from mishap, miscalculation, or other mischance, failed to see this fine gallop throughout? To see it, I mean, in the full and recognised sense of the term, not as those who held a place through only a part, nor those who followed the line, pursuing horsemen rather than hounds, nor as those who nicked in by means of a lucky road, nor even as those who jumped into the field where the hounds had just thrown up, and then looked round on still later comers—that at least they might indulge in the pride of precedence over them. To see it, as each of these would answer to his innermost soul requiring “yes” or “no” for its answer; not with the elasticity of definition that special occasion, or the vanity of long-established reputation, may bid him employ; but to see it, turning and working with the pack, not for the sake of being *better* than his neighbour, but to be independent of him, near enough to watch the foremost hounds, and taking his cue from them and nothing else. This is what we all strive for and aspire to; and no wonder it is found so difficult of attainment, when one is but an unit of a struggling mass, in which individual action is almost swamped

—and when hounds are stealing along as they can only do in a grass country. There are a certain few men who will almost invariably single themselves out at such times, and can grapple with nearly any combination of difficulty or fortune ; but even these are sometimes left in the lurch, baffled by a hindering crowd, or thrown out by some error at starting. For, nine times out of ten, it is at starting, or immediately afterwards, that men are put out of a quick burst. Once fairly under way, the crowd opened out or left behind, all goes merry as a marriage bell, and it is as easy to ride to hounds as to steer the proper course between flags. Listen to the hundred different reasons subsequently alleged for failure when a real gallop is over, and one good performer after another comes up, sick at heart, and cursing his “luck” loudly, or in miserable but more dignified silence. One and all date back to a mistake or an accident in the commencement of the run. Excuses at such a time are best weighed according to the measure of the man himself ; but how seldom do we meet one having the pluck (or do we dare ourselves) to say, “I made an ass of myself; I was thrown out in consequence, and I hate myself accordingly ! ” Over-wisdom, be assured, on the other hand, is almost as frequently fatal as the opposite extreme ; and it has been said by men who seldom miss a run, “As sure as I attempt to ride cunning I am ‘out of it’ at once.” I could even adduce several notable instances to prove that the most successful plan of operation is to ignore entirely the country passed over, and to ride as a total stranger, putting faith only in hounds and your own judgment of what you have to encounter.

Truly Friday was a day full of misadventure, and one that I fancy illustrated the above theories to a painful degree. A better field never stood at a covert side than hovered round the gateway above Sir Francis Burdett’s covert about noon on Friday. They had already been disappointed of a run from Gartree Hill, whence a right good fox had to be abandoned in consequence of interruption caused by a meaner-toned comrade ; but in spite of this, and in spite of a strong sou’-wester, they

were still confident of a run, sanguine in the present fortune of the Quorn. Let me briefly describe the covert. A low-lying sheltered brake of artificial thorn, so thickly laid that hounds can scarcely make way through it, situated under the frowning protection of the Little Dalby and Burrough Hills. On one side a dreaded unprofitable source of climbing, on three others a sporting country of endless and amiable variety.

It was a wiry artful-looking fox that broke away while hounds were giving tongue fiercely after a friend whom he had travelled miles that morning to visit (for a shepherd witnessed his coming, and now his going). Everybody saw him break, but only one was rash enough to holloa ; and the single scream brought Reynard round in his tracks. But the turn gave him a full view of the scarlet array he had doubtless learnt to dread ; for in a moment he was off again, and the field were pressing and cramming through the gateway for a start.

Three hounds are not enough for a run, but three hounds are enough to set a great many people galloping. Free protestation stopped them, however, in this instance ; and Custance spurred forward to check the solitary hounds. Firr's voice and horn could only bring forth another three couple, while the little grey Reynard was making two minutes to the good. But these few would not be denied. They dashed off with an impetus that meant nothing else than "catch us if you can," and that left the body of the pack a quarter of a mile behind, while half the run was covered. A narrow lane cramped the swelling body of pursuers for some furlongs, as they strove and squeezed after these flying couples in front ; but, once issued from this, they spread out over a grass pasture as if charging Burrough Hill in skirmishing order. A deep cross-cut fallow widened and lengthened them still further as the fractional pack disappeared in the plantation clothing the western slope of Burrough Hill. And now came the question—a question, too, requiring immediate answer and immediate action—whether to climb the eminence or to skirt its base. "No fox can face such a wind," reasoned the unhappy majority, including master

and huntsman; and on this hypothesis mounted upwards. "If he keeps on the low ground," thought the luckier minority, "we shall be right; and if he turns down wind he can only go into the Punch Bowl," so hugged the base of the hill, and were soon rewarded by the sound of hound-music borne down upon the breeze. In fact, quick as they galloped round on to the steeplechase course (this year so frequently serving the still more honourable purposes of foxchasing), the hounds were there before them, leading them a converse line over the very fences chosen for the spring pastime. Some two dozen men were there in time to settle into a place with them; and perhaps a moiety of these were equal to the task of keeping it. So extraordinary was the scent (equally extraordinary, too, that this fox should have strength to face such a gale as was blowing!) that these four couple and a half did the whole burst entirely by themselves, without even a hover of hesitation, and at such a pace that it taxed even "the Doctor's" powers of galloping and staying to keep within range of them. Apropos of this Doctor, it is a matter of universal concurrence that he ought to be labelled Dangerous; for, even after this severe run, he employed the afternoon in playing with such terrific pieces of timber as made your hair almost curl to look at them. Keen to jump as is Custance himself, he makes so light of what to most horses would constitute an impossibility, that fond youths are constantly beguiled to destruction in attempting to follow him. In this morning's run he was voted *unapproachable*—pace, country, and distance combining in his favour; though Sir Fred. Johnstone, Col. Forester, and Capt. Smith were running him hard. Capt. Coventry, Capt. Boyce, and Mr. Samuda were also well to the front; so was Capt. Park-Yates for three parts of the distance, and Capt. Gosling for the remainder—the latter and Firr cutting in as the hounds crossed the Burrough and Twyford road near the latter village. Scarcely a straight line was the chase; but it was over a most perfect country of true Leicestershire type, passing through the Thorpe and Twyford lordships, thence close by John o'

Gaunt, and into the spinney above Lowesby. Here was a first, but only momentary, check, succeeded by another five minutes back with the wind to Twyford village.

His nomade blood should have made him proud to die here, where the King of the Gipsies lies buried ; but, preferring victory even to this Westminster Abbey, he brought all his craft into play to aid his escape. Though seen by many people as he walked—rather than ran—along the brookside, the strongest lungs screamed the signal in vain, in a tempest that would have laughed at the voice of a sixty-eight pounder. So he was lost—soon, may we hope, to be found again, animated with a like bold policy as to-day !

THE QUORN HUNT TAKES THE WATER.

ON Monday, February 16th, the Quorn had a run with a good finish, and some curious incidents, both of flood and field. In fact, water in one shape or another was the prevailing element of the day. The ride to Willoughby was through a soaking downpour, and so was the first pursuit from the gorse thereat—a chase that had little or nothing to recommend it. The line by Ellar's Gorse to Thrussington Covert is usually pleasant enough ; but that a succession of plough and blind fences can be found on the route by an evilly-disposed fox was too fully exemplified. The ground, too, was rotten to a degree after the late frost ; and there was puffing and panting sore, though the pace was a crawl.

But the gallop to which I have alluded took its start from Grimston Gorse, whence many a good run has this year dated. The two or three fields that intervene between this covert and Old Dalby Wood were the scene of a great rush for a start, after which there was a five minutes' collapse, caused by the wily one having doubled back. But this was only his ruse for getting well away beyond. Timely information brought Firr and Co. upon his track.

Gradually hounds warmed to it, and, leaving behind all those who had not caught the signal for the double back, set off right merrily over the grass between Shoby and Asfordby. Thus they ran down to the railway, reaching it at the Frisby level crossing, and twenty people took to the iron road at once. But as the pack turned alongside of it a whistling coal train drove these horsemen hurry-scurry out of its way ; and now they were compelled to cross under the line by a narrow wooden bridge, where the towing path of the Wreake runs beneath it. This, too, over slippery boards, a train approaching overhead, and the wooden arches scarcely higher than horses' heads. As the rumbling and whistling grew nearer and more imminent, the terror of the rearmost of the band of horsemen grew insupportable ; for those in front could only move at slow foot pace, and one frightened horse would have brought terrible consequences to all. However, this danger was surmounted, as had been that of a bridge on the railway with a tempting hole in it, and that of the hasty jump down the embankment. So much for the railway, its perils, and its two bridges. But *the* bridge and the catastrophe were yet to come. Hounds were now racing up to their fox along the flat meadows where Hoby overlooks the river, and shortly pulled up suddenly at the site of what was once Hoby Mill. The old milldam, its narrow foot-bridge, and its foaming cascade, present just such a picture as we used to be called upon to copy, in the days when fond parents or grasping teachers looked upon us as rising artists. But surely it never occurred to us, even in our most frolicsome or imaginative moments, to give such life and colouring to the old sepia scenery—albeit wooden-looking foxes and club-legged horses adorned every page of our Grammar and Gradus. With every tongue going, the pack swam the slack water—mottled heads and waving sterns alone showing above the stream ; and at the same moment Mr. Tomkinson and Capt. Smith led their horses along the slippery plank that spans the waterfall. So far, so good ; for they reached the other side in safety. But not so fortunate were the next three—



The Bridge bent beneath them ; and for a moment or two they were all struggling together, the water dashing over their prostrate forms.

Lord Grey de Wilton, Mr. G. Moore, and the Reverend Welter—who, following closely one upon another, proved too much for the strength of a couple of two-inch boards. The bridge bent beneath them ; the side railing gave way ; Lord Grey de Wilton was knocked overboard on to the rocks a dozen feet below, his horse apparently on the top of him, and the other two steeds following suit. For a moment or two they were all struggling together, the water dashing over their prostrate forms. Lord Grey rose only to be knocked down again ; his horse then jumped over him into the deep water without touching him, and the three steeds commenced swimming about the pool like imprisoned hippopotami. At length they found an outlet into the main stream, and forthwith set out for a voyage down its course. Mr. Welter's sage old hunter soon tired of this novel diversion, and returned to land ; Mr. Moore's was lassoed in a hundred yards or so ; but the other was not restored to *terra firma* till he had navigated more than half a mile in the direction of Leicester. But the strangest part of the whole proceeding was that not one of the performers was the worse for either fall or immersion—and the drop on to the almost bare rocks should be seen to be realised. After all, the passage of this terrible bridge (one of the chief actors spoke of it as his *pons asinorum*) was not productive of any fitting reward ; for no scent could be owned to beyond it, a quarter of an hour's search in all directions—while the body of the field were accompanying the chestnut in his course down the river—proving fruitless. Firr led the hounds back to the milldam ; and there, surely enough, was Reynard, still ensconced on the head of an old willow tree. Old Bella's howl, as he pinned her by the nose with all the vigour and goodwill of St. Dunstan, brought all her comrades to the rescue, and a grateful sentiment to Tom Firr's lips. They stormed the tree trunk with such fury that their enemy abandoned his stronghold, plunged into the river, and was worried in it like an otter.

LORD ROSSMORE.

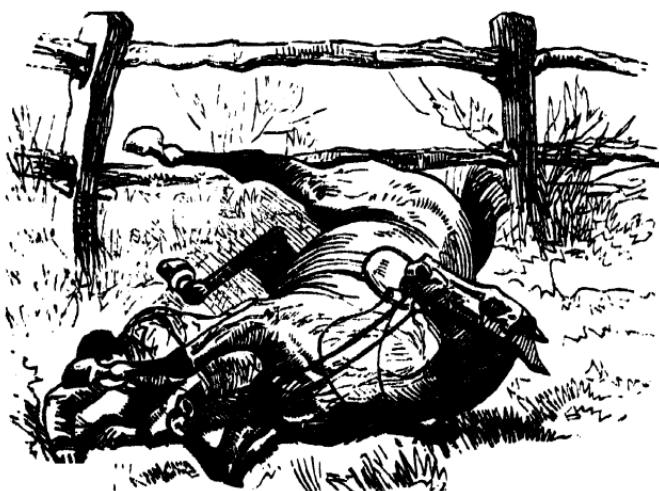
APRIL 2ND, 1874.

No sadder news has fallen upon Leicestershire for years than the sudden death of Lord Rossmore. It has come as an awful shock upon those who knew him so well—who were accustomed to welcome his cordial daily greeting, and to share with him a sport in which he figured so prominently and pleasantly. A happier, cheerier spirit than his came not into the hunting field, and no man carried the warmth of friendship more openly and heartily on his countenance than he did. He enjoyed life doubly that he enjoyed it with his friends—looking upon companionship as the essential to all amusement, and loving hunting as much for its social attractions and good-fellowship as for aught else. And as it was never his wont to speak ill or spitefully of others, so no one was ever heard to speak save kindly and affectionately of him. In this he was a bright sample of the men who characterise the present happy Melton field—men who take each other as they find ; who are above searching out and magnifying the little foibles of their friends ; who are jealous not at all ; who, having once dubbed and accepted an acquaintance as a “good fellow,” are content to hold him as such till something more than the distortion of his trifling peculiarities can denude him of the title.

A fine rider, too, was Lord Rossmore, and as bold a one as ever crossed a country. One instance of his undaunted courage is so vividly before me that I cannot but relate it. Many may remember that Wednesday morning of a few weeks ago, when the Belvoir started from Coston covert, for a run that eventually took them to the Witham Woods. To those who do, it will require no great further effort to recall how curiously the hounds of a sudden swung across a grass field through the pressing horsemen, now warmed to excitement pitch by a quarter of an hour's fast galloping, and how desperate a set of timber (defended too by a wide-set ditch) offered itself with

the turn. Lord Rossmore rode second at it (a farmer on a grey, it will be remembered, having barely saved a fall); his horse kneed it, and apparently rolled on to him. But in a moment he was up, and remounted as soon as the horse was caught. The next fence was of four rails, stronger and higher than the last; his horse was evidently no timber jumper, and was doubtless considerably blown by his fall. But there was neither hesitation nor desperation in the quiet determined way in which he gathered him together as he came up, squeezing an effort out of him that landed them both in safety, and made the horse a hunter on the spot.

Those who will miss him from among them as a sportsman are, one and all, mourning for him as a friend. He endeared himself to all with whom he came in contact, and it is no mere figure of speech to say that there is not a hunting man between Melton and Harborough whose heart has not bled for the young life thus snatched away.



SEASON, 1874-75.

A FROST BROKEN WINTER.

Next winter you will pass with me ; I'll have
My house by that time turned into a grave
Of dread despondence and low-thoughted care,
And all the dreams which our tormentors are.

And we'll have fires
To thaw the six weeks' winter in our blood.



1874 closed about as unpropitiously as it well could, so if the New Year is to be a happy one, it will at all events start with the advantage of contrast, and is sure of a heartier welcome than usual.

Mr. Tailby found the sense of inaction so unbearable that he even anticipated the thaw, determined on seeing the old year out in proper fashion, and, acting on Capt. Thomson's theory, that hounds, and hounds only, ought to be considered in determining when hunt-

ing is practicable, betook himself to the chase on Thursday, December 31st. The day was one of the most bitter of this unfriendly winter; and it would appear his defiance of it must have actually shamed the clerk of the weather into a less forbidding humour, for the latter changed his tactics

the very next day. The ground being inches deep in snow, there was little fear for the hounds; but had accident befallen any of the little band who rode with them, I question if they could have persuaded the insurance companies that this feat did not come under the head of the unrecognised "extraordinary risks." We nearly all insure in Leicestershire now, by the way. There is something very comforting, even to the most romantic mind, to know that when you are wincing under a squeezed rib you are thereby earning an honest penny; while, as for some few brittle individuals we could name, they make a handsome yearly addition to their income by this means. It has been proposed to the companies that they should extend their operations to our studs; but to this they one and all allege that they are not at present in sufficiently wealthy circumstances to admit of their undertaking this branch of the business.

But to return to Mr. Tailby, who met his field (some five or six in number) at Stonton Wyvil, Capt. Whitmore driving to covert in a sleigh. In addition to the pleasures of the snow, which lay knee deep in the furrows, a dense fog prevailed, in the midst of which the hounds were thrown into Sheepshorns, and found their fox immediately. Being unable to do anything with him, they were taken on to Nosesly, and the scent being fortunately (?) as much opposed to hunting as the elements, pursuers and pack were never far separated, and spent the rest of the afternoon round there and Billesdon. The most remarkable feature of all was that, though the horses plunged and stumbled blindly through the snow drifts, and the whole was enacted in an atmosphere wherein vision was often limited to a few yards, not a horse or hound was lamed, nor a hound lost, and the whole party returned home scatheless.

THE WEEK OF THE SEASON.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 26TH.

NEITHER the fatigue of the day, nor the pleasant lassitude usual to hunting men after a second cigar and a manifold repetition of all that has just passed, must hinder me from jotting down at once what has happened with the Cottesmore. All has been sport this week, in one phase or another. Sport was in the air in a predetermined unmistakable shape as we rode to covert this morning. A pure crisp cloudless atmosphere raised "What a hunting day!" from every tongue—even from the most chippy or unprecent. And so it turned out. There was a scent upon which a pack of Pomeranians (the most unsporting specimens of the race canine that I know) could have run, and in which the Cottesmore bitches simply revelled. The meet was advertised for Knossington; and so the hounds met in the meadow below the Hall, while the field—and a field of noblest quality and proportion—met in Mr. Duncan's dining room, and there prepared themselves for the serious business of the day. This day was to be devoted to the woodlands. Tell me, unbiassed and experienced reader, what do you attach to the prospect of Owston Wood, Launde Wood, Tilton Wood, and such other wild sylvan resorts? Do you not connect the names with harassing hours of idleness, with many bitter disappointments, and many futile vows of future abstinence from thus tempting fate? But, on the other hand, do you not also connect it with many a grand hunt—of the wildest, truest, and most sporting type—when you only see good men ride, over a country where there is really room for hundreds to compete? To-day, too, the best of foxes did all they could to show out the advantages of a lovely scenting day, and to point out the beauties of a country that in its own way has no rival. One of them chose out the right side of Owston at starting; and with him was enacted a twenty minutes' ring that asked for condition and made good blood a

sine quâ non. There was little jumping—consequently little incident—but there was bursting pace in the gallop round and past Prior's Coppice, through Launde Wood and back to Owston. This, the first act, ended in oblivion there; but the main venture of the day was from Tilton. We all know how fond foxes usually are of ringing the changes among the multitudinous woods hereabouts—where, happily, however, owners remember they live in Leicestershire, and stamp the trade mark—*fox*—on each and all of their possessions. But good genius was at work on this fortunate Tuesday. Two of the noble race went away into the Quorn country (where these others hope shortly to disturb their present security); and some seven couple broke with them—only to be brought back together with a luckless company by the whip. Meanwhile Neal, the second in office but now chief of the working staff (West being detained at home by a family affliction) moved down towards the bottom of the covert to a holloa that had something too professional about its ring to disregard. This was from the voice of Mr. F. Sutton, who was found to be working the family throat to a tune that has wakened Leicestershire many a score of times before. Hounds took up the cue at once—only nine couple of them, but what mattered it on a day like this? Yes, it did matter, as the sequel will show. They ran like wildfire up to Skeffington Hall, where Mr. Tailby was ready to speed the parting guest over the road, and hustle along in his wake as soon as the chorus opened forward—Lord Grey de Wilton, Custance and some rising unknown on a blood chestnut also helping on the van. Really a grand run was this—if others estimate it as highly as it stamped itself on my humble opinion. The oldest of grass, the fairest of fences lie sound Skeffington and Rolleston, and over this perfect country hounds swept on without a check till they even got abreast of the Coplow. What other mark can you put upon such a fifty minutes (up to the first check) than the epithet *superb*? Some will say, “no fox could live so long.” If so, let me point out that nine couple of hounds

cannot carry a head to burst a fox ; and so, though the pace was enough to leave the line marked by miles of men leading their horses, it was never sufficient to bring such a fox back to their mouths. The first and only piece of plough caused the first and only check ; then they drove him through Botany Bay, and in five minutes more a grand fox saved a worthy life in a rabbit-hole under Quenby. May he live to be old and happy, and teach his children that an open course is their first and only fitting duty ! For those who were fortunate, to-day was one of exceptional sport ; but good and evil fortune have much to do with a start from the woods of High Leicestershire.

On Wednesday, January 27th, good fortune took us to the Pytchley, who met at North Kilworth. Passing over the morning, we come to the afternoon draw of Misterton Gorse. No prettier start could have been effected than was achieved from here. A fine big fox away, with the pack streaming after him in view over the grass field above ; and then as merry a seventeen minutes as could be made to order, with a proper sequel to make up the whole forty-five. If you happen to know the pleasant grazing grounds from the starting point to South Kilworth, you want little description to picture the enjoyment of hounds going over it at best pace—when each fence was to be jumped anywhere and each one had to be taken in a gallop. Lord Spencer, Capt. Middleton, Mr. Corbett and a gentleman from Gloucestershire (at least we have seen and heard of his performances there) were cutting out the most of the work ; Goodall and young Goddard also in closest attendance on the pack. The remainder of the run was through the South Kilworth and Stanford Hall coverts with a turn back and a kill in the latter.

Thursday, January 28th.—A bye day with the Quorn at Brooksby Hall. Forty minutes with a kill in the open, and an afternoon run of fifty-five—and all over the best of the Quorn country—are two bare facts that speak for themselves. The Thursday bye days have almost invariably proved the best days

of the Melton week ; and this was a glorious specimen. Two years ago there was exactly such another bye day at Brooksby —winding up *also* with a magnificent fifty-five minutes' ring (on that occasion from Cream Gorse).

Half the grand sport of the week has already been chronicled. Thursday, Friday, and Saturday still remain. The two former days had very much in common over and above the fact of their success. Both were lawn meets of the Quorn ; both were favoured by the happiest accident of scent and country ; and both were distinguished by a sharpness of style and action that deserves the term *brilliant*.

Thursday, then, was a bye day, which, as we have remarked before, ever carries with it an invariable felicity of augury and event, at least with the Quorn. There was a cheerful little meet at Brooksby—perhaps a hundred “men of business,” with a troop of seconds apparently far out of proportion to the number of competitors assembled. The little spinney of Bleakmore might have produced two foxes with the same ease had there been the half-thousand of a Friday ; but there would scarcely have been the same fair start and good result as now. Hounds settled at once to their fox, and—to tell the briefest story—rattled him to death in thirty-five minutes along and about the Brooksby and Rotherby valleys, rolling him over in a burst in which the first check came only after twenty-eight.

From Cream Gorse there was an initial ten minutes as promising as anything we ever saw, hounds and men both carrying ahead as if each individual were the flyer of the pack or the hunt. The former took the scent across every field abreast, and some twenty of the latter charged their fences in a line—such fences, too, as, without exaggeration, you seldom see jumped in cooler blood. But after a turn over Gaddesby, and with no more imminent point in front than Owston Wood or John o' Gaunt, everything in thorough swing, and apparently a run ensured, the prospect was all at once blighted by a dispensation which placed two idle members of the working class

right in the path of the fox. May their Arch-enemy soon beguile them to emigration for that they spoilt the most assured gallop for which we ever essayed a start.

Now we have to speak more fully of the afternoon run, the best part of a truly rich day. Five minutes waiting at Thorpe Trussells ended in a holloa-away at two opposite corners. "This is the best country, George, yell away for bare life!" But Firr's horn is heard at the same moment at the other end, showing his attention was to be devoted in that direction, and necessitating the speaker's scurrying round at best pace to avoid being left behind. The pack broke over the road towards Ashby; while some forty good "customers" jumped down with them into the dingle beyond, and made the best of their way through the ridge of plough that bounds the wide grass tract below. When hounds do run quick over plough they can always distance horses; and so while these two fields were being crossed they gained time and room enough to settle to their work. A struggle through fallow is hardly good preparation for a hog-backed stile with a downhill approach. But this was what met them—a trying necessity—almost immediately they landed on the grass. An elastic rail must the top one have been, for some twenty pairs of shins and hoofs rattled and bent it, yet I believe it remains still unbroken. The fence below—running down from Thorpe Hall—was still more formidable; for it was made up of a black thick-entwined bullfinch, with a wide ditch open to the approaching negotiator. Refusals resulting from two other attempts on either side allowed Lord Clarendon to take a lead up the opposite hill, and to be one of the first to swing over the wide bottom that divides the parishes of Ashby and Thorpe Satchville. A good fifteen feet fly is the lowest estimate we can form of it; but this did not deter Mrs. Molyneux from accepting her husband's lead with the same cool confidence she displayed throughout the run. Indeed, putting quite aside the natural inclination to do justice to ladies' feats (which naturally strike one before those of the rougher sex), it is impossible to deny a sense of local

pride in seeing Leicestershire so ridden over as it had been in one week, viz., by Miss Hartopp in the Tilton run of Tuesday, by Mrs. Molynex in the event in question, and by Lady Evelyn Coventry on Saturday last. In each case there was the quiet, unassuming *savoir faire* that in no circumstance of life can we of coarser mould pretend to, and yet in each case there was an underlying of determination and a genuine love of the sport, that carried them successfully through every difficulty.

A momentary hesitation after the chasm had been crossed allowed time for opening the gates across the Twyford road, before reaching the lucky bridge that here spanned the Twyford brook—hounds again taking up the thread in earnest, and keeping it unrelaxed for some miles to come. Mr. Tomkinson did nothing towards lowering the top bar of the four rails that attempted to bar further progress, though some follower kindly rendered them a degree or two easier. The old Twyford grass country is too well known to descant upon; so it is needless to mention how scent, as usual, lay upon it, or how each obstacle seemed to take quite as much jumping as the one before. But they do put their fences very close together round the village; and apparently build them expressly with a view to turning old hunters out to grass. However the last-named gentleman (though his horse was labouring under the disadvantage of having already, early in the day, spent a quarter of an hour in a ditch) and Captain Smith, assisted by Tom Firr, successfully and continuously demonstrated that the strength of a hedge is only that of its weakest point; and, fast as hounds went, they were well accompanied up to the Lowesby Plantations. Thence on by the right of the park and along the valley towards Baggrave—two foxes now in front, and the fresh one taking up attention just when they ought to have been killing their first—and when horses were rapidly losing that elasticity which, after all, is almost the chief pleasure of a gallop to hounds. On the whole, perhaps, the change was a fortunate one; for the Master meant not to spoil the Baggrave

of to-morrow, even with the penalty of whipping off. So a further turn to the right again put their heads for Thorpe Trussells, and with another twenty minutes they reached it, after traversing some of the choicest country of the hunt. Touching Ashby village on their road, they made good the covert from which they had started, after fifty-five minutes of the best and severest type. It is next to impossible to kill a fox in the scentless covert of Thorpe; so the day ended by leaving him there unharmed. Of those who rode from end to end I may be allowed to mention (leaving out those already named) that the Master never went better, that Lord Clarendon (who, I should say, has seen as much as, if not more, of the whole week's sport than anyone else) was one of the pioneers throughout, Lord Wicklow held a good place, and Capt. King, Mr. Hassall, and Capt. Grimstone lent their presence to each yard of it.

Friday, January 29th, was essentially Colonel Burnaby's Day; for was it not his lawn meet, his breakfast, his unfailing little covert, his fox that was galloped to death in the morning, and his fox that closed an early afternoon so satisfactorily? Baggrave Covert first resounded to the horn only a little before twelve o'clock, and by two a brace of foxes had been fairly run into and horses and hounds pronounced to have done fully enough. The early part of the first run, fast now and again, consisted of a half-hour's ring by Barkby Holt and through the parish of Hungerton. But when hounds got back to the covert they set the ball rolling again in a much more lively fashion; for they forced their game to break again almost immediately, dashed away on his brush, never let him gain a field's advantage, and raced into him after about twenty-two minutes as fast as was ever ridden to. Not once, but three or four times, they ran him into view, and seemed to be actually coursing him—though they never got their heads up; and yet he struggled on, going as long as he could, and then turning with the venom and hatred of death to make his teeth meet in two at least of his enemies. The tremendous pace of this last

scurry was well testified by the fact that out of a Friday field there were only some half-dozen present to hear the who-whoop at South Croxton Village—though, doubtless, the twisting course and the sharp turn back from Lowesby, Plantations (the three points given being sufficient to explain the track) had much to do with this.

Another call being made on the Colonel's covert, another start was soon effected, and soon crushed by a general rush over the line. In a hot and sweltering mass the crowd pressed forward, the oppressive heat of the atmosphere and their own excitement working the whole assemblage up to boiling pitch—amid which the huntsman alone appeared cool and undisturbed. And well it was he did; for in no other condition could he have achieved a run under present circumstances. As it was he worked his hounds forward—while Mr. Coupland strove his utmost to gain him a moment's law—once more got on terms with his fox, and pushing him past Keyham, and past the left of Scraptoft Gorse, killed him in Mr. Tailby's country near Houghton. A five-mile point and thirty-five minutes in doing it.

A BYE-DAY STOLEN.

ON Thursday, February 11th, the Quorn left off at Owston Wood at 4.30 p.m., at the end of a bye day at Gaddesby.

For several days a lingering frost had made hunting, even when pronounced practicable, a matter of much difficulty, no little danger, and very doubtful enjoyment—the call of duty rather than pleasure bringing men each day to the covert side. The morning in question was even more unpromising than its predecessors. Snow still lay on the plough and on the roads, while the gateways had ice in them that would almost bear your horse's weight. So it took an hour or more of anxious indecision, of consultation with groom, gardener, and a casual baker on his rounds, the disheartening sentiments of each

being pooh-poohed in turn in favour of our own wishes ; it took much heel-testing of the lawn and the trampling down of more than one newly-dug flower bed, before we manned ourselves in breeches and gaiters, and (more with the view of avoiding luncheon than in the hope of hunting) rode forth to the trysting place. Arrived there, though, it was cheering indeed to find that at least the hounds were on the spot, and that many other sportsmen, as sanguine or as foolish as ourselves, were also there assembled. A motley group they made, too, these usually brightly-arrayed Nimrods. I wot the old elm trees hardly believed that under these varied disguises were the same gay Quornites they had so often seen before ; and probably set them down as individuals in quest of the Gaddesby shorthorns rather than of the chase. Truly their garb was a sign of the times, and in each case carried the exact impress of the wearer's opinion as to weather and the chance of hunting. (Remember, Melton, unlike Leamington and Cheltenham, has no Parade to console the disappointed foxhunter as he returns.) They who came in the full glory of pink and leathers (looking amid the wintry scene as if their valets had forced them, like hothouse plants, for the occasion) were radiantly convinced of the fitness of the day. They who appeared in butcher boots, saying little but gazing in wistful inquiry ever and anon on the master, were they who, though doubting in their own minds, were yet prepared for serious action. Moreover they had bethought them that, if compelled after all to return from chasing the wild goose in place of the fox, they would proclaim their shame less loudly and present a less crestfallen appearance than if arrayed in the paint and feathers of full dress. Lastly there were the billycock-and-gaiter number, carrying no sign, vestment, or symbol of pursuit, save, perhaps, a hatstring, and, certainly, except a saddle flask. These had come on the offchance, partly for the exercise of a ride, and chiefly that, in the (to *their* light) improbable event of a day's sport, they might not incur the miserable reproach of having missed it through carelessness.

A goodly field having by degrees collected, it now became a question of persuading the master of the feasibility of hunting. Accordingly, those who had journeyed from the most favourable points of the country were thrust forward to give their reports, while those who had come from more weather-stricken districts were kept scrupulously in the background. The mixed feeling of the meeting must, however, have been as palpable to the head of affairs as to ourselves ; and it must be noted for future occasions of like uncertainty that all sportsmen should come clad as if no possible doubt existed. As it was, the only hopeful conclusion that could be arrived at, based on anything like reliable opinion, was that the “going” on the grass was not absolutely or impracticably bad. But when an old member of the hunt clinched this with the argument that foxes were certain to keep off the hard ploughs for their own sakes, the master yielded with a good grace, and moved off to brave the terrors of the soil. Tom Firr being kept at home by the injury to his back, from which (to the universal regret of the hunt) he still suffers severely, Mr. Coupland had to-day to carry the horn in person. We need not linger over the little spinneys which held not, nor on the five minutes’ spurt with an outlying fox near Bleakmore, who, after running the railway for a mile, disappeared as it were under a sleeper ; but may get on to Barkby Holt with all dispatch, confident in having learnt that it was fit for hounds to run and horses to gallop. We have seen many a good find and many a good gallop from this famous, and now well-kept, fastness (and devoutly do we pray that it may be our fate to see many another !) ; but never have started forth after a subject whose course and principles were straighter than now. It took two critical minutes to get hounds out on the line, the operation being by no means facilitated by the over-hastiness of even this miniature field ; and two minutes at such a time is a long reprieve to a fox’s life and a heavy handicap on the efforts of hounds. The Baggrave valley was the line taken from the first ; and a ruler marking its continuation on the

map would deviate but a trifle from the whole course chosen. Lord Carington on the left and Sir Beaumont Dixie on the right made play over the few earlier grass fields as hounds began to settle to their work, and up to Baggrave all the little company were in creditable attendance. There was no moment of loitering at Baggrave covert, for hounds took the line through it at once. At the back of the hall they commenced the smartest part of their career, running now as hounds should do on a scent over grass. It was a point of chance, fate, or instinct that took you into, or kept you out of, the field bounded by what looked, as you came down upon it, an unjumpable bottom. There was nothing unjumpable about it, though, except in the view of a post-and-rails downhill from the rising ground above. Still in riding to hounds first impressions are the strongest, if not always the best (and thus it is that one keen man surpasses another chiefly on the score of quicker perception); so this deceptive place was broken through, not jumped, and two fields' galloping scarcely made up the ground lost in avoiding it.

After this many easy pleasant fences and a succession of grass that offered soft sound landing for horses and no frosty mischief to hounds' feet, brought the gallop up to twenty-five minutes—when for the first time they checked, between Lowesby and John o' Gaunt. Soon on again, just touching the covert; and out beyond along the Marfield bottom, which they threaded merrily to the Tilton hills. When fifty minutes had elapsed reynard stole through the buildings of Mr. Frank Sutton's farm at Tilton not a hundred yards ahead. But his outhouse meanderings saved him. He was seen by an old woman to go on; but the lady under notice kept silence until questioned; and meanwhile the varmint had stolen on in his struggle for Tilton Wood and life. Mr. Coupland worked the problem out capitally, hit the line out once more, and hounds came to a standstill over a drain in the gully beyond, when a sudden holloa forward took hounds and field over Whadborough Hill, and with a brief quick turn into Owston Wood.

There can be little doubt the run fox was left here; for he was fairly hunted to a standstill. But let this be as it may, the chase went on through Owston Wood; and hounds were whipped off when breaking on in full cry for Prior's Coppice. Yet it was a right good run and a right good point, while a better line could not be picked out in Leicestershire. From Barkby Holt to the smaller Owston Wood is a straight nine miles, while the gully mentioned is not a mile short of it. Prominent among those who saw and enjoyed it were Lord Grey de Wilton, Col. Forester, Sir J. Ffolkes, Capts. Molyneux, Yates, Farley, and King, with about a dozen others to make up a number best calculated for the truest enjoyment of a run. It cannot but be noted, too, that Miss Hemming rode well to the front throughout; and that the grey showed no falling off from his previous form over Leicestershire.

A PROTEST AGAINST BUTCHERY.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24TH.

SIX inches of snow and a confirmed malignant frost. Hunting, too, has only another month of life—of which this is in truth but a deathlike phase. So broken a winter has not been known for years.

But taking advantage of the present dearth of material for history, I would crave leave to speak a few words on the matter of Digging out of Foxes. I have no intention whatever of making an attack on any particular Hunt, Master, or Huntsman; but merely to bring the subject forward as a fact that demands either justification or active condemnation.

Granting that there are two ways of looking at every question, let us for once refrain from limiting our vision to one side, and aim at something like an impartial view, before plumping arbitrarily for our own opinion, or asking for yours, worshipful reader. In order to do this, I must request you to

put yourself in turn in the place of the parties most interested, and, as much as possible, to cloak your own sympathies. Let us take the huntsman first—a zealous, hard-working individual and *ex-officio* a natural enemy of foxes (this same *ex-officio* thirst for blood extending equally and involuntarily to the master and to each of the subordinates). He goes out to kill his fox. He sleeps better for having achieved it. He looks upon a mask dangling at the saddle with as grateful a satisfaction as an Indian brave upon a new-earned scalp-lock—none the less precious, perhaps, that it was tomahawked from a sleeping foe. He has toiled his utmost for the life-blood of his victim, and what matters it to him, if the aid of pick and shovel have brought that life-blood easier to hand in the end? Not a whit more than the ostrich hunter spares the ostrich, because he seeks refuge by hiding his head in the sand. Then he has his hounds to think of. Bad scent, ill-luck, or a succession of failures, may have kept them on plain kennel fare for some days; and surely, he argues, they must be disappointed and vexed when losing the choice morsel below ground. Then, again, he bethinks himself, in noble disinterestedness (for he pays none of them) of the poultry-bills; he makes a mental note to tell some truculent claimant that the robber is now slain; and finally—and more fatally for reynard and sport than all—he triumphantly notches down one more to his death score.

The part of the Master we need not dwell on. In nine cases out of ten he has become inoculated with the same sentiment as his lieutenant; while, again, he seldom likes to debar that functionary from the little treat in contemplation. So, putting aside altogether the notion that a run, not a kill, is the essential of what in a hunting sense is usually understood by sport (to show sport, remember, being the object for which he holds office), he will oftentimes look on while a good fox, wanting only the chance to give him this desideratum, is unearthed and torn to pieces before his eyes. Probably he will murmur something apologetically about a “*bad fox*,” or

"*hounds deserve him.*" But, if you were a fox, and you found that an idle or lukewarm earthstopper had left a favourite refuge open to you, would you not gladly take advantage of it without remorse of conscience, particularly when you found your powers flagging? We must grant that *hounds* are glad to get hold of their fox; but we cannot grant that it is at all necessary they should do so. In a well-stocked country he must be a bad huntsman who cannot find them blood enough by fair killing; while in a badly-stocked one it is very certain you cannot afford wanton bloodshed. Moreover, it is almost an allowed fact that hounds well blooded in the cub-hunting season do not require it to any extent afterwards; and many authorities maintain that a good "*flare-up*" of triumph and excitement over the mouth of an earth is just as effectual and satisfactory to hounds as an actual worry.

Lastly, let us take the body of sportsmen who make up the *field*, through whom and for whom hunting exists, and who for that reason possess every claim to have their feelings consulted. They hunt to enjoy themselves, each in his own peculiar fashion—and many and diverse are the individual opinions of each day's events. But was any one of them ever yet known to come home and answer an inquiring neighbour with "Capital day! Saw two foxes dug out! One they caught beautifully—pulled him out by the brush and threw him among the hounds; the other bolted out, but they had cleverly kept the pack close to the hole, and so killed him too! Rare sport, and my old mare's not a bit tired!" But, having drifted unconsciously from analysis into argument, I may as well assume myself the representative of the last-named body, and state their opinion boldly. Let it, however, be clearly understood that these remarks in no way apply to cases of exception or necessity, but are directed against the too-prevalent idea that digging out a fox (to *eat*, not to give him a fresh start) is a fitting and sportsmanlike climax to a run. As a case of exception we may take that of a diseased or thoroughly bad fox, whose life would never conduce to sport, and who is

therefore better out of the way. By cases of necessity I mean; for instance, an overstock of foxes, giving rise to complaints of damage and demands for their destruction. Scarcely any other circumstances can be instanced for justifiable exception; and yet there is scarcely a pack in the Midlands that does not frequently lend itself publicly and shamelessly to the deed.

And what *do* the field think of it? *They hate and abominate it*, each and every one of them. They neither sympathise with the feeling that prompts the act; nor hold with the expediency of its commission. To them it represents no pleasure, and certainly coincides with none of their notions of sport. They would find much greater fun in seeing rats killed in a barn, and derive from the sight a much higher sense of satisfaction. Condemned, probably, to stand about in the cold, unwilling witnesses of what they heartily detest, they spend the time in giving free vent to expression of their annoyance and contempt. It would do many a huntsman good to hear what is said at such moments. He would find, too, that, however much respect he may have earned at other times, much of this contempt will extend to himself, and serve to lessen good opinion that he cannot afford to despise. Finally, fox-digging, in the sense we refer to, is a crying enormity, a disgrace to a noble sport, and should be put down as rigorously as vivisection. Bring forward excuse, palliation, anything you like, there will still remain a sense of keen abhorrence of the act. So unmistakable is the disgust—ay, loathing—excited in the minds of many good sportsmen, on finding themselves made an abetting party to a bad case of fox butchery, that on such occasions (whether rightly *à propos* or no) the following tale ever recurs vividly to my mind. An old trapper once told me (and I believed it, though you may not) that in the wild, unorganised fighting in the Far West, some forty years ago, he was one of a party of revenge who cut a camp to pieces by a sudden attack. Food must follow fighting; and gladly they seized upon a savoury meal that was awaiting their slaughtered enemies. A hunter's appetite is proverbial; but long ere its

limit was reached, a strange bone made its appearance that brought an instant chilling check. The closest scrutiny, the freest blasphemy, could make it out nothing but a human finger. No Channel passage could have acted more instantaneously on the weakest of mortals than the discovery did on these strong men—and not one of them could ever boast that he had digested cannibal food. This is no made-up story; I received it and give it as true, and though the parallel may be a strong one, I can vouch that the effect produced on many organisations by the knowledge of having assisted at a cold-blooded digging out, falls little short of the illustration.

A RING FROM THORPE TRUSSELS.

THE sport of Thursday, March 11th (I may almost say of that week, in the Melton country) was obtained from Thorpe Trussells, the way thither being comfortably varied at Baggrave. The little covert having for once failed, the Colonel's invitation took the pack and the field *en masse* up to the Hall, where the cup went round with material that (as was, or was not, proved in the coming gallop) might have

thrown warmth into a Bourbon's blood,
Nerved the enervate, given a dastard heart,
Made cowards brave, the helpless help themselves.

So, reader, follow me to Thorpe Trussells and give me a lead from it, only you must start like a sprint runner if you mean to make sure we are not left behind. I know of no place that requires both ears cocked, both spurs ready for action, or your cigar lit merely for luck or "make-believe," like Thorpe Trussells. Hounds swoop away from it in a moment from exactly the opposite point you expect, and in that moment you may find yourself penned in, condemned to follow at a sad and maledictory distance. So pray nip out of the road as quickly as you can, imagine yourself called upon to clap Tom Firr on

to his hounds, and, above all, keep clear of a piece of beans planted by the good sportsman who owns the precincts. You know the first dip down, where horses pull so that it is a pleasure to them and to you to give them their heads for the ascent beyond. You know the quick turn that places you on to the grass—always a racing scent here and a downhill gallop. You know that if you have pushed through these two ploughs you have no crowd ahead of you down the grass valley ; and you have your work cut out to achieve sufficient pull where timber cutting has breached the strongest of blackthorn ramparts. You must have a handy one, too, to turn sharp to the right with the pack within twenty yards of an open gateway that seems placed by Providence, but which takes three or four of the first-class clean over the mark. Forrard ! forrard ! old ladies ! “ Give ‘em a moment’s time, sir,” and don’t grumble if the holloa lets the huntsman rob you of his own place—though it is trying even to young nerve and young blood not to get swing enough on at a post and rails with a yawner beyond. Forrard, along the valley towards Ashby, the fences raspers and the pace tremendous—Mr. Foster leading, and Firr in position just level with the rear of the pack. Now a flight of rails, of stiffness undeniable and altitude horrible—with a wide, but luckily well trodden ditch beyond—becomes an absolute terrifying necessity. In Leicestershire we do not jump unless we are obliged, much less do we imperil our necks unless a scent is palpable and exacting ; but you are clean over in the tracks of the leaders, so are we, and so are fifty more—though our own little clatter was re-echoed by a crashing that reverberated like thunder along a storm-laden sky. Go on, sir, now, and make the best you can of the fenced bottom that next faces you, and that lets hounds stretch themselves while you are deliberating between impossible timber and a double into a hedge that may give way, but that will most likely turn you over. Make up your ground quickly in the next turn up to Ashby Pastures ; and don’t hang over the wide doubly-fenced ditch that awaits you on the way, or (by

all that is impetuous) I must "jump into the small of your back," as they have it on the less ceremonious side of the Channel. Lose no time in getting into, and out of, Ashby Pastures; don't go round it. *In medio tutissimus ibis*, here as in most other choices of conduct; and if you reach Thorpe Trussels without a blowing horse, I can only say you are better mounted than we who follow you—though we have only been galloping twenty minutes. You won't grudge the fact of its being a ring, certainly not if the country is new to you; and when, ten minutes later, you pull up at the sand-holes at Twyford Village, you will not be sorry that your second horse has only been trotting along the inside of the circle. And the fact reminds me of one of my pet declamations, viz., that against second horsemen and their illdoings—not mine only, but that of all who have hunting at heart, whether they flaunt their penmanship or no. The fallacy (let alone the resultant mischief to others) of attempting to get your second horseman to "nick in" in the middle of a run is now so fully recognised that the almost invariable and peremptory order is to "ride quietly along the roads and bring my horse up cool for the second run." So firmly, too, is the principle gaining ground that there was nothing solitary in the instance of Friday, when, on a pig-headed second horseman invading wheat (in a manner that, however unnecessary, was freely licensed a few seasons ago), the whole field set up a chorus that might make him shirk bread for the rest of his life, if shame were in him. Not that farmers are appearing a whit more captious about their wheat—on the contrary, as evinced by the same day. There is one, by name—well, never mind his name, there is only one who lives and farms at Ingarsby—who, on the cry "Ware wheat" being raised on his land, ejaculated "Never mind the wheat, gentlemen, 'tis but forty shillings a quarter after all!"

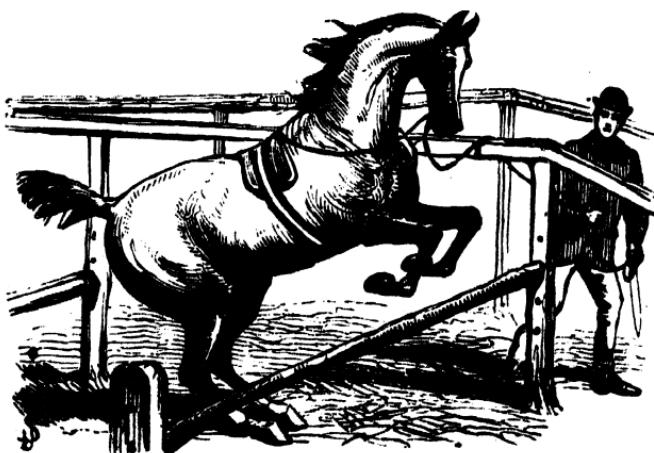
On Tuesday, March 6th, Melton had no hunting; which was borne with a chastened spirit after the protracted frosts of the late winter. Pigeon-shooting being now entirely confined to the summer, cock-fighting being restricted by a law whose

the race and steeplechase meetings, were there to assist at the last effort of the more indigenous sport. Despite the near advent of the end, both men and horses seemed fresh and gay as they cantered over the greensward to Cream Gorse. Sorrow may or may not have been in their hearts, but they showed it not in face or manner. If apparent anywhere, it was in their coats. Those of the horses looked ragged and patchy ; those of their masters—well not quite that, perhaps, but, excepting some few brilliant instances of spring growth, exceeding sorrowful. And there were some hats—oh dear, we won't speak of them ! We know we thought to do a bit of cheap charity by presenting our own to an old almsman hard by the stable yard ; and were only partially gratified when he thanked us warmly, adding “It war just the thing he wanted for that there bit o' new sown peas in his slip o' garden.” However, a new coat or a new hat at the close of the hunting season is an object so contrary to the true order of things, as to raise rather a spirit of curiosity than of covetousness in breasts or heads hidden under more weatherbeaten garments ; and they are generally held as betokening in the wearer either an access of fortune or a deplorable recklessness.

From Thorpe Trussells a fugitive at length took the desired line towards the Dalby grass, but hounds had to be lifted on over the dust of the fallows beyond before any amusement ensued. Then they were laid on quickly, and once more ere the season ended the field were treated to some galloping and jumping, and to the sight of hounds running up to a fair head. So on over half a dozen nice fences and a few Leicestershire fields past the Great Dalby windmill, which lies beside a road, into which a fair flight of rails and a mild thorn fence pointed the only way. The combination was not a severe one ; but horses are seldom fond of flying into a road, especially after unpleasant proof of how painful a concussion even hardened turf can cause. So, though a brown horse popped cleverly in, and a grey landed with a loud grunt (we saw him advertised for sale a while since as “making a noise,” so there is no treason

to the remark), No. 3 got close under the timber, and shivering it with a crash that all the parish of Dalby must have heard, opened a broad way for all who wished to come through. By the bye, how inconveniently noisy and telltale are old railings that break (and horses invariably know when they will *not*)! They afford your friends an opportunity they never miss of making derogatory remarks upon your most promising horse—one possibly for which you expect to get a long price at the end of the season. Moreover, they not improbably turn round before you can return from your undignified position between the beast's ears, or compose your features into something like an expression of unconcern. Memo—give your new horses plenty of work over the bar, before you bring them out in the field as timber-jumpers.

At the brow of the hill immediately facing the rough front of Burrough it was necessary to pull up, just as the warmth of the sun and the vigorous exercise had fairly conquered the north wind, and men began to afford testimony to the heat of the chase. Then, dipping down to the steeplechase course, ran up to the village of Burrough and round by the Punchbowl to Gartree Hill. Here all trace of the fugitive was lost.



SEASON, 1876-77.

[** Military duties in India robbed the Author of the season 1875-76, and his unexpected return home at the eleventh hour for the winter 1876-77 limited his records to the Belvoir and the Cottesmore. This happened, however, to be the most famous season of a decade for the latter pack.]

FIRST FRUITS OF 1876.



ROXTON PARK is the yearly rendezvous named by his Grace of Rutland, whereat Melton is first invited to ride to his beautiful pack. The dropping of the curtain for the season is also marked for this time-honoured spot, but we have nothing to do with that at present. Now we look forward to months of such fun as only hunting can give us. We have no lame horses in our stables, and we are as "keen as pepper."

So on Wednesday, Nov. 8, you might have found yourself at 11 A.M. under the gnarled oaks of the old park, if you number punctuality as one of your sins; or you might have met the hounds issuing from the gates at 11.30 if you are practical. You were better off in the latter case; for it was a bitter morning, such as November seldom offers—a hoar frost under the hedgerows still, and a

north wind that treated your ears as if they were autumn leaves. There was but a gentle crowd with the hounds—a matter of strong contrast—with the Kirby Gate gathering of the Quorn, whereat the innovation of *bicycles* (ye gods, what an age we live in !) prepared us for the news that elephants are in future to form part of the Lord Mayor's Show.

I do not know if Anno Domini 1876 be marked in the public statistics as an exceptionally healthy one; but I confess I never saw men or horses with such a bloom on coats and countenances. Faces so rosy and skins so shiny have a happy augury about them, and show a regularity of habit and diet most creditable to summer quarters. We live in reforming times nowadays, yet float along on a good Conservative stream, whose waters have more the flavour of stout La Rose and Lafitte than of the Gladstonian wash. Yes, men have turned out this year with a radiancy that only thorough health, happy anticipation, new coats, and a stable in rare condition could beget. Nothing to mar their pleasure but a blind ditch, and every moment of the morning bringing the nod or grasp of sport and good fellowship. It may be almost traitorous to say so, but six days a week (*de rigueur* at Melton) do not suit everybody, even when the best of good living and the purest of tobacco go to lessen the strain on the system. Indeed, I fear it is only the orthodoxy of the Church militant that imposes sufficient inaction and rest to keep a sound body linked to a healthy soul in this blessed and grass-growing diocese. Later on, if our weekly routine be not interrupted by any demon of the Arctic Regions—roused to retaliation by the home thrusts of the *Alert* and the *Discovery*—we may see many a pleasant face, that would now put a pippin to shame, looking a trifle *tried* and drawn, though no less pleasant than now. But even then (if the shade of Moore will forgive the flippant adaptation),

When many a cheek so red has paled,
And many a cold been caught,
When many a leg so sound has ail'd,
And many a rib grown short,

we shall have more straight riding, more concentrated zest, and (possibly) more consideration for hounds than in this first blush—for men have hardly “got their sea legs” yet. Talking of *colds*, it may interest delicate readers to learn they are very summarily treated and ejected in this school of pharmacy. There is no time for coddling or making a malady of them, unless it is to the extent of a basin of gruel and a tallow candle on a Sunday night. On first appearance they are at once thoroughly fumigated with Mr. Carlin’s pastiles, then clapped in between a bottle of pink wine and a mustard plaster, and so nipped in the bud. If this treatment does not suffice, try two extra waistcoats, and a pulling horse with the Quorn lady pack; and if *this* doesn’t cure you, ask somebody else’s advice.

Well, but I have a run to tell; so let us rejoin the sweet “middle pack” of the Belvoir, as they trot down to Burbage’s Covert this sunny Wednesday morning—Gillard on the confidential grey meaning business, and ourselves confident or careful as our mount or nerves determine us. We have already snatched an after-breakfast gossip outside Newman’s Gorse, whence a brace of cubs have previously done duty as blood to the young entry, and so a blank draw has robbed us of our deserts, to wit, being left behind for our own loquacity. We have hustled anxiously over a few little fences from Waltham Thorns, and perhaps even larked over the Thorpe Arnold Brook under no other necessity than that of exuberant spirits, and we have seen a first fox lost from sheer want of scent, after two miles of difficult tracking. Thus one o’clock finds us basking in the meadow below Mr. Burbage’s invaluable covert—Melton represented by Colonel and Miss Markham, Messrs. Lubbock, Creyke, Behrens, Younger, and Parker, and Captains Smith and Atkinson; the ducal country by Messrs. Welby, Mirehouse, Burbage, Thorold, Mr. and Miss Turner, &c.; the Cottesmore by Mr. Heathcote; and the world in general by a body of men by whom hunting is regarded as almost a *sine qua non* to enjoyable existence, and as a component part of a well-governed empire.

In a bend of the river Wreake, and hemmed in by the railway crossing the neck of the isthmus, you would imagine that even bold reynard would have but a poor chance of striking into the open from Burbage's Covert. But many and many a good run has dated from here. It is a snug quarter that foxes favour even from a distance, and where they know they are sure of welcome and security.

Hounds are scarcely in covert before a farmer and a rustic are to be seen gesticulating on the hillside beyond the river. They appear to be engaged more in disputing as to the identity of some strange beast that has shown itself to them than bent on attracting the attention of the huntsman and his followers, now penned up in the triangular field by the railway. At length some one ventures to suggest that a fox has been seen, whereupon Gillard takes hold of the suggestion and his hounds together, and gallops to the spot. True enough, a fox has gone away as freely and readily as may be; but still again there is some little delay, whip and bystanders disagreeing as to the exact point of exit. Every minute at such time is, as we all know, a guinea's worth of profit or loss to the chances of a run. Hounds spread keenly right and left, as if conscious of the emergency; and a skirmisher on the right, catching a guiding whiff under the warm hedgerow, soon brings his comrades to the line. Quickly they swing to the echo, and the ball is now set rolling over the turf. There can be no vigour about it yet; for there are storm clouds hovering, the ground is cold from the overnight's frost, and reynard has made the most of his start. So field after field hounds start and stop, dash off, and hesitate again, while men spurt here and there in all the fluster of such initial moments, only to have to pull up again just as their hearts are hardened, and their horses in their stride. Hark holloa forward at the Burton Tollbar, a mile ahead. This should put us on better terms, and we hurry eagerly up to the point to start afresh. The pack now take it up merrily; we try to believe that we are in for a quick thing and a brilliant one, and scuttle up the

green lane, alongside whose convenient track hounds are now really running to a head. Sharp to your left now, and follow Gillard over the post-and-rails that bound the lane. Hold up, young one! If you *do* mean to hit the post, you needn't make such a disgraceful clatter over it, and for ever ruin your reputation as a timber jumper! There is beautiful grass in front—Gartree Hill and the Quorn country opening its arms 'before us. Every fence has a jumpable place in it, if a summer's growth of leaves, and a summer's sun now shining, will let you see it. Our course is nearly due south, and the flickering brilliancy of the sunlight and the half-frozen surface of the northern sides of the hedgerows form two little difficulties, under which more than one horse succumbs. The hedges are still so thick that hounds can scarcely pierce them—while a fence that later on we may fly in fifty places, now rears itself a black stockade with scarce a gap or loophole. But a few minutes over the turf brings us on to cold plough, and hounds scatter every way baffled and beat. A stray labourer, though, tells of a sharp turn towards Gartree Hill, and they are lifted on once, twice, till the two fields of unsympathetic clay are left behind. Taking no heed of a deceptive holloa over the Burton Vale, Gillard quietly and cleverly helps them to work it out till they have crossed the brow above Gartree-hill Covert, and embarked on the stout-fenced pastures of the Great Dalby lordship. Now they are again going fast enough for a gallop and many a pleasant jump; and we revel in it as almost the first fruits of the season. A right straight-necked fox keeps us moving on steadily southwards, turning neither for the tempting shelter of Burrough Hill nor the coverts of the Quorn. The beautiful vista of the valley of the Melton steeplechase course now stretches invitingly below. Sheep may even be seen dashing aside on the opposite hill, proclaiming the passage of the harmless terror-striker. Reynard has nothing but his own safety to think about—even had the silly creatures a thousand new-born lambs to offer—and safety is gradually becoming a very embarrassing consideration to

him. He has still a couple of miles to the good ; but in a few minutes his pursuers have crossed the valley. Now the sheep have foiled the line, and cause another short stoppage ; but soon a soft furrow ends the difficulty. An ugly drop fence of double dimensions, with the choice of a slippery stile ; a couple of open gates ; three inclosures of ridge and furrow—then, with nothing but Owston Wood and its wild neighbourhood in front, we are suddenly brought to a standstill at a well-used drain between the villages of Burrough and Twyford. One hour and five minutes, very straight, not fast, but over a beautiful country, sum up this run. That our fox was completely beaten was soon proved, for of course the blacksmith hard-by had a terrier of mettle (was there ever a blacksmith who hadn't?). “Old Thos,” as he termed him, tackled his quarry at once, and bundled him out to run for his life, with a hundred yards start of a truly racing pack. But this good bold fox was too stiff and tired to save his brush ; and, though he had the fairest of chances for his life, they coursed him to death in a couple of fields.

A blinding snowstorm marked the close of the first day of the Belvoir in their Melton country ; but then they had run into a district said to be almost polar in its attributes, and whose chilly altitude should long favour foxhunting by resisting the incursions of brick and mortar.

I cannot close this short account of the day's doings without taking on myself to mention that the one lady who rode through the run, and rode through it brilliantly, was Miss Markham, to whom blind fences and timber appeared equally welcome, and equally to be made light of.

A NORTHERN VETERAN.

I FIND it noted that the Cottesmore had a long and severe gallop on Tuesday, Nov. 21st, from Loddington Redditch, through Brown's Wood, by Withcote Hall, Launde Wood, Brook Priory, and Oakham Pastures. Near here the huntsman for a critical minute or two was imprisoned in the railway, while his whip viewed the fox beside it, and tried in vain to get the pack to him. When the former escaped he soon got to work again, but it was slow hunting over the green flat past Oakham. Their gallant fox was crawling about the hedgerows when they reached the farthest point of the run—Hambleton Pasture ; but the delay in the railroad saved him.

He could not have travelled less than twelve or thirteen miles, and passed covert after covert without touching one. It was truly a magnificent run for hounds, and, though devoid of any of the usual incidents of the field as far as riders were concerned, a run worth journeying far to witness. It must be confessed that—though, as some of our detractors would have it, we by no means go out in Leicestershire solely to ride over fences—we do like a jump or two when our horses are fresh, the turf honest, the fences fair, and hounds running as they can only run over the grass. The impression must not, however, be given that there was absolutely *no* fencing in this run—for it was obvious that one fine old sportsman, who *had* travelled far to witness this, and has been paying us a visit from the county whose capital is "bonnie Newcastle," had succeeded in finding at least one bullfinch. He is ever to be seen pushing to the front as keenly as, but a thousand times more cleverly than, an Oxford undergraduate, and to-day he carried away the proof in a feature scarred and crossed like nothing but a newly-fired foreleg (if he will forgive the simile). But it was in the Quorn run of the previous day that he was to be seen to best advantage, when throughout there could be but one opinion, viz.,

That the first in the van
Was that old Grey man
Who rode on the old grey mare.

Among the others who saw the run none did so better than Colonel and the Messrs. Gosling, Captain Pennington, Lord Esme Gordon, Sir Bache Cunard and a lady, Lord Grey de Wilton, Mr. Julius Behrens, Christian, and Captain Tryon.

FROM STAPLEFORD.

IT is a pleasure—a labour of love—to write about Saturday, December 2. The essence of a run in a grass country is *pace*, and for pace there must be scent, the which for some days previous had been an unknown quantity. But on a day like this hounds asked only for a fox in front of them, and pace, excitement, and all the glorious attributes of a Leicestershire burst came as a matter of course. Not with one reynard only was there a gallop, but fun and merriment with three, as I will endeavour to show. Seldom does it happen that hounds can *fly*—with fox after fox, over meadow or over plough, never flashing beyond and never having to stoop for the line—as they did to-day.

An early sunny morning in the country gave way to a black dull atmosphere that must have been yellow darkness in London. The air was hot and laden, but the storm clouds had burst overnight, and there was nothing of threat or ill-omen in the smoky duskiness of the sky. The furrows lay often inches deep in water, and the road puddles kept the most sociable of friends wide separate—an' they cared to come respectable to the covert side. The old "Bedehouses" of the Stapleford domain were named as the meeting place, and thence the hounds were soon taken into the park. As they crossed the mossy and now almost splashy turf, their retinue found additions from every side, horsemen flocking through every gate, and hurrying to join the already swollen throng, till the

old hall looked down on as gay and gallant a party as ever mustered to the chase under its grey walls.

To find a fox took little time, for in the spinney at the Fishpond, with its well-stocked larder of wildfowl, one was soon unkennelled, sleek and lusty. Him they routed ruthlessly from his snug quarters, bidding him leave the bed of comfort for a struggle for his life. Swiftly he flashed out of the park, and swiftly did hounds flash after him; but there was little of swiftness or flash in the exit of the penned-in crowd. Nay, rather, it was more like the foxhunt of a nightmare, that lingering struggle to edge your way along a wire-fenced road, and through a gateway whereat all the carriages of the county seemed gathered. You could see nothing of the pack; soon you could not even hear them; but you knew in your agony that they were running hard, and the misery of helpless restraint well-nigh choked you. At last you are free from the park, but only to issue into a lane, and crush through a farmyard, with perhaps half a hundred more fortunate in front. You must grind your teeth and gallop; the foremost are little more than a field ahead; and now you get a glimpse of the pack streaming a field ahead of *them*. For a mile or so there is little but grass and gates, but the ridge-and-furrow rides deep and pumping; and a second horseman, who ought to have been ten miles behind, or in bed, or anywhere else but here, lets one gate slam in your face. You are a well-dispositioned man if you can pass him in silence, and a better still if you glare only straight to your front as you go by him. Now you see one of the leaders down, and, as you reach him, find that Captain Coventry has been picked up unhurt from a fall—as ugly as the one that an equally good gallop from Stapleford brought him two years ago. Now you emerge on to the highroad that leads to the village of Whissendine, clatter along it for a hundred yards, and the hounds swing across you, pointing their heads for Leesthorpe. Three fields of plough stop them no whit; not wheat, nor turnips, nor fallow can hinder them to-day; and, flying onwards, they leave you no breathing

moment to amend for your late struggle. Dashing down a hedgeside, where their fox has turned leftwards in his course, they hurry you on again over the grass, and you must splash knee-deep through the wet gateway, shout "Ware hole!" at the top of your voice, as Providence takes you galloping in safety over a honeycombed bridge; then turn as sharp as you can over the fence to your right. The thorns are high and black, and a brace of men are brought round by refusal before Mr. Grey swishes through the top twigs. Now take a lead from Mr. Cecil Chaplin and his gallant lady, over the stiff timber into the lane; catch hold of your horse tight through this acre of smothering plough; and with them, or as near as you can, pop in and out of the string of little meadows beyond. The dark oak rail that looms on the far side of yon stiff stake-and-bound proclaims you are entering on the strong-fenced bullock grounds of Whissendine. Pull your panting steed together and harden your heart, for there is no choice but to have it, or surrender ignominiously. That stout old sportsman from the north will give you a lead again. Steadying the chestnut almost into a canter, he bounds over the whole in his stride; and close behind him there rattles over another as grey and as good. No shame to you that you accept a lead from two such elders as these. We are wont to boast that our generation produces bolder and better riders than that of our fathers, and that the men of our present youth outdo even the heroes of Mr. Apperley. But what have *you* to say, sportsmen who *dare* retire at *forty*, pleading failing nerves or exhausted stamina, when you look upon three-score-and-odd leading the flower of Melton and of Leicestershire, as it has done time after time this season? It cuts the ground from under your feet. You have nothing to urge but that you are made of inferior stuff. You won't own that; but at least be silent or honest. There is no surer sign that the mettle is gone forth out of a man than when he informs you that he doesn't "mean to ride to-day," alleging depth of ground, blind fences, or aught else in palliation. *Qui s'excuse s'accuse.* Who

in Heaven's name wants him to "ride," if he doesn't choose to? He comes out for his own pleasure; let him take it as seems best to him. But it is pitiable work, and the more pitiable because always palpable—the propping up a reputation with excuses, when the power to maintain it no longer exists. It avails not in the present; but rather throws ridicule on the past—a past which, left alone, might speak worthily for itself. But who shall deny honour to old age, when in spirit and in deed it can not only show its vigour unimpaired, but can still take a lead in a field where we think young blood must best be served?

Two raking down-hill pastures now, and Whissendine is in view on our left, the pace tremendous still, and hounds with a clear start over the road in front. The famous stream of Whissendine is but a pony's leap hereabouts; but the two strong laid fences that come next, both leaning down the hill towards you, are a sore effort to a half-blown horse. The pack dive into a little spinney. You congratulate yourself that all is the plainest sailing. You are on the best of terms with hounds and yourself, when the former divide on a fresh-found fox; the huntsman (as you, of course, think) takes them on with the fresh one, and you are left, when the whip sweeps down on your section of the pack, to stare at your watch and upon several faces as vacant as your own.

But truly—yes, *truly*, though the circumstances of the case may appear somewhat unfavourable to veracity on this point—*this twenty-five minutes* was the whole pith and kernel of the run; for the chase beyond only took a half-mile circle round Whissendine village to end abruptly. To the spot of division, or of stoppage, it was *brilliant*. Further comment I need not stop to give; for there are two other brisk items of which to tell.

A journey to Laxton's Covert was fruitful only in the news that a fox lived *up a tree* close to Berry Gorse, a mile further on; and had learnt to deem it so much his home that, the informant added, he invariably returned to his lodging within

a quarter of an hour after being disturbed. So "haste to the trysting tree," and feel thankful that there is a sportsman in authority who is not likely to let any "huntsman's tricks" be played on poor reynard. Not three counties away from here, I have heard it told, a good fox lay in a hollow tree, his yellow eyes gleaming in the far darkness, as the gentleman of the whipcord peered in, hayfork in hand, to dislodge him. "Give him a fair chance!" quoth the man of the horn, the rays of the sun as he looked upward causing a slight spasm of the left eye, the while he absently whistled his hounds to him round the foot of the tree. Whereupon Whipecord plunged his fork into the aperture, as if harpooning a porpoise; reynard dashed out flop against the only hound on that side of the tree, rolled head over heels, picked himself up again, and reached the nearest fence in safety. "You've missed him, you angel!" the huntsman shouted, but in a whisper. "Angelled if I did!" replied Whipecord in the same tone. And the latter was right; for though poor pug beat them in fifty minutes that day, he succumbed in five a week after, with the tynes of the fork deep visible in his back.

But the Cottesmore don't do such things. Their fox to-day had twenty yards to help him down the first hedgerow, his meagre portion of law diminishing to a scant fathom as he bundled over the fallow next to it. Thence he got on to the grass, and they raced him furiously to Little Dalby. Custance and Mr. Powell flew the ugly gulf that tried to stop them half a mile beyond, the latter being pulled back again by a grasping blackthorn, that wanted a six-foot spring to clear it. Hounds then sped on by Burdett's Covert, and stopped with a steaming few at a drain under Great Dalby. This merry quarter of an hour constituted the second item of the day.

The third, of somewhat like character, emanated from the Punchbowl, and consisted of ten bright minutes at top speed round Dalby Hill to Gartree—all galloping and jumping that was confined to less than half a dozen, who dipped headlong down with hounds. A delay, with another fox or two afoot,

caused loss of time and consequent loss of what might, with any luck, have been a grand run.

The close of the following week was not marked by such sport that the superb hunting weather led one to expect. If you, reader, who have been entered in the Melton district, and for whom the sweets of Ranksboro' and the Punchbowl have once been distilled, were told that these spots were to be visited to-day—if accordingly you had sent on the pick of your stable, while you scattered the mud with a hack that can gallop all the way, and that seems rather to prefer your breakfasting rather late; if, moreover, the morning was dull and dark and quiet, the glass rising, and the lightest possible breath of air fanning you from the east—if you had steadily (*obstinately*, your “pal” said) refused overnight to bite the end off a second *Claro*, had wound up your watch by the sober hour of eleven, and now felt fit and keen as one of these happy Christmas schoolboys—would *you* not have been sanguine? Gay too, not as “a mere pretender to the name,” nor with

the gaiety of those
Whose headaches nail them to a noonday bed;

but in the full glow of a gallop to covert this lovely hunting morning, with a heart full of hope, and in the knowledge that you are casting in your lot with spirits as cheery and genial as ever wore pink or smashed an oak rail. And, as you glanced longingly from the top of Ranksboro' Hill over the green flats that stretched away from your feet to Burley, or stood above the Punchbowl, on an apex rising from a sea of historic turf, and conjured up lines that should embrace Pickwell, or Lowesby, or Ashby, would not *your* ears, too, have been pricked as keenly for a whimper as those of an old hare before harriers? And would not *you*, too, have owned to disappointment almost bitter as you moved onwards with the knowledge that two of the best and safest coverts in all Leicestershire had failed to give you a gallop to-day? A wild and stormy night had probably to answer for this, and,

rigidly cared for as these two snuggeries are, foxes had forsaken the low gorse for the better shelter of the woods. And again, though there was a fox all the time in the Dalby Plantations, hounds failed to find him, and the lungs of the rustics failed to bring them back when he showed himself. The ivied-tree at Berry Gorse had no lodger to-day—though we had shortly a fresh instance of the bird-like propensities of the flying foxes of the Cottesmore. Laxton's Spinney was drawn blank, and the gallant owner of Stapleford almost allowed us to think the park was empty too, before he galloped up with the news that a fox was in a fir tree hard by. For a week he had known of and peeped at him occasionally, hoping he had in store for us a burst as good as that of a fortnight ago from this very spinney. Now he could see him still, curled up thirty feet from the ground, where one fir tree leaned reposingly against another. He had shouted at him a moment since ; but the head had still peered down from between a forked branch without a movement. "He won't come down; somebody must climb after him!" Young Goddard was at once equal to the occasion; tied his horse up while Neal collected the hounds at a little distance; and set to work promptly, as if accustomed to air the Lonsdale livery during the spring months in the adventurous science of birdsnesting. Up rose the red coat and hunting cap, higher mounted the breeches and spurs, till the bright figure aloft looked like a gaily clad doll on a Christmas tree. Now reynard's perch was reached, and the expectant field below (doubly anxious after the disappointments of the day) every instant thought to see him bundling headlong down, when the voice of the cherub aloft was heard to cry, "Why, he's a dead 'un!" 'Twas a picture to watch the blank look stealing over one and all of the upturned hopeful countenances. For a moment mouths opened, but not to speak, assuredly not to laugh. Then as they closed again a sound, half a sigh, a quarter a whisper, and a quarter a groan, fell from every pair of lips. Active annoyance and disappointment was most prominent on the face of the owner of the

covert as the dead fox was held up to view. For the others, they dispersed in silence and in sorrow.

But the good proprietor had another with plenty of life in him, close at hand, for one was quickly stirred up in the osiers adjoining the railway. Taking up his path alongside the railway line, at a moment when the field were just passing over the crossing, our fox gave a perfect instance of how directly opposed to each other are the services of steam and sport; for, taking a sharp turn back, he left all but some half dozen men as fairly shut out from the chase as if they had been beyond the Channel. Hounds went like pigeons across the park, but the hunt lasted only half a mile beyond, and thus there closed an inferior day.

THE TWO GREAT RUNS OF THE SEASON WITH THE COTTESMORE.

FROM ORTON PARK WOOD.

JANUARY 6TH, 1877.

THE dulness of a non-hunting day exists not for the man whose task it is to bring back such a run as that of the Cottesmore on Tuesday last. The pleasure of calling up its details and incidents is in itself an excitement to him who writes, even if he is unequal to rousing sympathy or enthusiasm in the breast of those who read.

No time or need for preface. Material, enough and to spare, is at hand, if my good genius will but enable me to grasp and hold it up before you.

A sunshiny morning, with the wind in the north, and a bite of frost in the air. Knossington the meet—and of course the whole of hunting and riding Leicestershire gathered at Mr. Duncan's hospitable Hall. 'Twould make a roll-call almost as long as that of a regiment to enumerate such a field by name—all Melton, all Harboro', all the Cottesmore men, and all of the Quornites and Tailbyites living within reach. Half

an hour later these were clustered on one side of Orton Park Wood, whence this good run was to begin.

Orton Park Wood, then, as it is more familiarly known—or Overton Wood as it is written on the map (and you will want your Ordnance sheet if you would appreciate the full measure of this chase)—is a square, well-timbered covert of perhaps thirty acres, with its four faces standing north, east, south, and west. The sound of “gone away,” to the southward, soon set the whole of the swollen field in motion. A fox had left; but hounds would not leave another still in covert. Well-organised and quiet as it had hitherto been, the phalanx of horsemen now spread itself round the outside of the wood, galloping eagerly hither and thither as each fresh alarm was sounded on one side or another. A second fox left with his head pointing in the same direction, and so the bulk of the field were led to congregate about this point. Meanwhile there were still a third and a fourth leading the hounds round the wood; and the echoes rang continually, as first here, then there, they crossed the rides with the pack in pursuit. From the central point in covert, where the two deep-rutted paths crossed each other, you might have viewed that white-tagged old fellow some three or four times as he strove in vain to break through the encircling chain of enemies. But now the pack have penned him in a corner, and he must either give up his brush, or trust it to the strength of his lissome limbs. They have stood him in good stead before, so with a bold heart he dashes out, the leading hounds clamouring close at him, and sets his mask fearlessly into the north wind. Now then, all you who are within reach or knowledge of his departure, there is little to guide you, if out of sight, save the suddenly receding sound of the pursuing pack. If you are in the wood with the huntsman and his whip, Colonel Gosling, Messrs. Westley Richards and Duncan, hustle down the muddy rides for dear life! If, more fortunately still, you are on the north side with Lord Esme Gordon, Messrs. Creyke, Samuda, Featherstonhaugh, Sir Beaumont Dixie, Lord Manners, and some fifteen or twenty

others, you had best push your hat well down, and settle to your work that moment—for in a twinkling the pack is half a field away. You are lucky enough if you arrive on the spot as hounds are nearing the second fence—Mr. Samuda skimming the first post-and-rails, with Neal in close attendance, while Colonel Gosling is leading the stronger detachment by the line of gates some two hundred yards to the left. The turf is soft and holding alongside the belt of trees that runs from the wood to Ranksboro' Gorse (a mile and a half away), and which hounds are skirting at a truly awful pace ; but you *must* push and gallop if you would live with them at all. You had better have kept with the division on the left ; for the third fence is timber, up-hill, and with a slippery ditch in front, that turns over Down's young one with a double summersault ; the only feasible place is blocked ; and, after all, you must scurry away to the gate as best you can. It looks a thousand to one that our fox is bent upon Ranksboro', and accordingly, as they near its bridle-gate entrance, Mr. Samuda and several others turn in, and, I am sorry to add, lose the run in consequence. Rising the crest of the hill, hounds suddenly bear away to the left of the gorse ; you are still nearly a field behind them, and this field and the next are studded with large anthills as thickly as a clodhopper's boot with nails. 'Tis trying ground on which to gallop fast, but you have often seen three hundred men gallop over it before ; and can you ever remember a peck or a stumble ? So you lay your reins on his withers, put your trust in the good angel that has kept your neck straight on your shoulders for so long, and strain after the hounds. “Forward on !” It's plough now, and *yet* they can run ! Blessed augury ! We're in for a “ripper.” You feel it in the jump of your heart, that sends the blood glowing to your cheeks ; you know it in the thrill with which the hound-music strikes upon your ear ; and you swear that here, at least, is pleasure such as a million of consols could not buy.

You can afford to push over a downhill fallow or two, and now you are on the best of terms with the pack and yourself as

you near the Melton and Oakham turnpike road, the Whisenden-dine in its early stage running just at your feet. Tally-ho on the opposite hill. There goes reynard, not a quarter of a mile away, the terrified flocks scouring from his path. The brook is here fringed with osier beds, and you must diverge right or left to reach the pastures beyond. Lord Esme Gordon finds it practicable somewhere to the left, the others bear off towards the road. A blind ditch closes Sir B. Dixie's hitherto prosperous career, while the uncompromising drop into the lane brings Mr. Markham (who has been going right well for the credit of Eton) to alarming but, fortunately, not serious grief. The ugliest fence in the run indeed is this, with its formidable stake-and-bound, its yawning ditch, its drop on landing, and the cutting of the road beyond. Neal clatters past and up the macadam, having overshot the mark near Ranksboro'. He too views his fox over yonder, and, turning into the field once more, as soon as the bridge is crossed, cheers his hounds to gain a field upon his foe. You'll get no pull at your horse at present, for they rattle on now as fast as when they started. Another dragging plough well nigh chokes horses that already find their girths too tight for them. Jumping is becoming a labour to more than one horse, whose strength or condition cannot cope with this bursting pace, or with whom liberties had to be taken at starting. Lord Esme Gordon is down, and Mr. Creyke is detained at the same time; Mr. Duncan has got into difficulties somewhere, though he was here but a moment ago. Over another ridge for Leesthorpe—the Colonel, in his cheeriest vein, leading the van, with Mr. Ernest Chaplin, Captain Featherstonhaugh, Lord Manners, and Neal and Goddard close to his skirts; so on, over the grass and over fences that you may take in your stride, the hounds racing for Dalby Hall. Now you jump into the Pickwell and Leesthorpe road, and the Colonel is out again in a jiffey. "You can't get out there, sir!" shouts the huntsman; "the field's wired all round that side!" You may either follow his advice and him, and go round the field by the road, or you may take your

chance with the leader, and ride down the field after the latter to the Dalby Plantations. True enough, there is a wire blocking most of the fence ; but there is one loophole left (as there generally is in a difficulty, if hounds are running only fast enough). It's not altogether nice, but it must be done. The blackthorn binders are very low, though stout ; there is three feet of room beyond, and the little brook is only about six feet broad, with a rising bank above. A very pigmy obstacle indeed in Ireland ; but Leicestershire horses generally make a scramble of it when asked to double, and so there is a scramble, though a successful one now. Open this gate quick, and take the grass up to the Punchbowl, or you may be left stranded in the plough ! See, Neal's horse is completely stopped by the pumping ascent, and is useless for further proceedings ; Goddard has vanished, and the fun isn't over yet. The hounds merely run the rim of the Punchbowl, barely touch the covert, and are away again over the meadow at the top, the leading couples starting on as gaily as ever, though there is sad tailing behind them. Not a moment to get breath. You must plunge down over Burrough Hill, and steer now for Burdett's Covert in the hollow below. Don't jump over any of the stragglers, but cheer them on if they will listen to you. There is no official present, and the quartet last-mentioned have been joined only by Lady Florence Dixie. The latter has been sending along the little steeplechaser Sunbeam with a vigour that has distanced all who started with her ; and the mare, served by blood and light weight, is fresh enough to do all that will be required of her. You leave Burdett's Covert just to your right, passing it at the best place you can muster. Surely this fox must die soon ; for on Burrough Hill a rustic tried to point him out as just before the hounds ! Still they run over the hill for Thorpe Trussells, taking the line into the very teeth of an old hedge-cutter. Of course he has headed him ; and, of course, a check ensues. It is the first one though, and we have been galloping for *thirty minutes* without a second's stoppage. "He ran the hedge soide" is the information ; but

the pack will take no heed of strangers, and the hunt is like a ship without a rudder. One member of the party yells over the line with all the little breath left to him, till cheeks are purple, eyes threaten to jump out, and the brim of his hat is nearly waved off. The Colonel leaves his steed to lean with his head over a gate, while he runs after the hounds to turn them. But, in spite of all these scientific efforts, some minutes are lost ere the hounds can be brought on to where they are now holloaing back on the Melton steeplechase course ; so it may be taken that this grand burst virtually ended—in its character as such—on the Thorpe Trussells road.

However the hounds soon recovered the line, and carried it over Burrough Village to enter upon the finest and wildest grass country we can boast in the Midlands. But neither huntsman nor whip was to the front—their horses being dead beat by the pace ; so much valuable time was lost ; and when hounds might have been carried forward to the head they were straggling helplessly. I have little hesitation in saying that could the executive have been there on second horses a run might have been carried out that would have had no parallel for years. As it was, the field was kept moving on over the beautiful Twyford and Marfield country till another short check came at the end of an hour and five minutes under Halstead. Again the chase was continued, and for fifteen minutes more they ran nicely and continuously to Owston Wood. Without halting, they took the line on through both the woods of Owston, through Lady Wood, back to Orton Park Wood, till eventually hounds and horses brought up quite tired out near the Kennels of Barleythorpe—a single run (no doubt with various foxes) of fully two hours and over more than fifteen miles of country.

Nine couple of hounds meanwhile made another run of their own from Owston Wood to Launde, thence over a splendid country, past Belton to Wardley Wood, through this, leaving two couple behind, the remainder killing their fox in the corner of Allexton Wood. Colonel Burnaby alone saw all this,

after the horses of Mr. C. Chaplin and three others were too tired to follow; and his run, counting from the original start at Orton Park, may be put down as about two hours and forty-five minutes.

On Saturday (December 30th) the Cottesmore had a very fast fifteen minutes from Gunby Gorse to ground (witnessed only by Captains Coventry and Smith, Sir John Lister Kay, and Messrs. Frewen and A. Coventry). The gallop took them to the borders of the big woods, and just escaped the plough throughout.

A BELVOIR FOX AND A QUORN PIG.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 11TH.

To resume with Saturday last, the 6th, when the Belvoir were at Goadby, and the first week of the New Year was brought to a sporting and satisfactory conclusion. The meet being well within distance, it followed, according to unwritten rules much in vogue, that the time allowed for the journey to covert might be reduced to the finest of minimums, and every chance be run of being left behind. And yet the Belvoir were almost punctual to-day, and the calculating ones had barely time to vent the morning anathema on the "stupidest ass that ever took a horse on to covert," ere hounds were away with a rattle from Goadby Bullamore. Often and again has it been said that the foxes of Goadby were, from over-nurture and too kindly pampering, but cowardly instances of the true domestic vulp. But Goadby retrieved its credit and hurled off the impeachment right bravely to-day, for it sent forth a representative that it took an eight-mile point to kill. Of this the first hour's work offered comparatively little of excitement, the chief interest centreing in the final half-hour and the satisfactory kill. I have before had occasion to describe the chain of overhanging coverts which border the vale of Belvoir, and finally merge into the Quorn country to the south-west. As these pass

within a mile of Goadby, it will be no matter of surprise that the fox now under pursuit took advantage of them at once. Beginning at Harby, the point where he reached them, he followed their whole line without dwelling anywhere till he attained the homestead known as Little Belvoir. Then, dipping boldly into the open vale, he made his way over a country that must have been quite unknown to him till he could travel no longer, and threw up the sponge in Willoughby village—one hour and thirty-eight minutes from the find. The last three or four miles of this run (over the old Dalby country, and to the left of the Curate) was pretty and continuous hunting, the hounds working their line out fast and cleverly, over grass so deep and wet that galloping was quite a matter of difficulty.



A novel instance of the dangers attendant on hunting—and one that fully deserves a place in the alarmist column periodically presented to our wives and mothers by the daily papers—was furnished at the scene of the kill. A poor old “widow woman” (as they would term her in the language of the soil) hearing the hubbub, must needs run out of her cottage to see the “hoonters.” Fired by the same sounds, her one ewe lamb, in the shape of an enormous sow, broke out of its sty to

join in the chase ; and, rushing past the doorstep, upset its mistress right among the hounds. The scene at the moment could be nothing but laughable—the old lady lying on her back in the mud, howling that she would be murdered ; the huge pig squealing and grunting as it dashed hither and thither in an agony of terror ; and the astonished hounds scuttling from the spot with their sterns between their legs. But soon it transpired that the poor old soul had broken her leg, when, in default of a remedy, a collection was made in mitigation of the injury.

THE RANKSBORO' RUN.

JANUARY 20TH, 1877.

Am I wrong in saying that the grand gallop of Saturday last, Jan. 13th, was as fine a run as has been seen in Leicestershire for years ? I *may* be beyond the mark in classing it thus ; but there are others whose enthusiasm will carry them as far, or farther, in their estimate. Come with me, reader to Ranksboro', and judge for yourself. Pegasus shall carry you as near the front as he can ; Pegasus at least is never ridden to a standstill ; Pegasus turns his head at nothing ; Pegasus never breaks an oxer ; Pegasus never lies on you in a brook. Would that I had a stableful like him !

You may or may not have read of the recent Orton Park Wood run, which formed the chief material of my last two letters. Well, the chase of which I am about to tell was undoubtedly after the same fox, traversed almost exactly the same country, but eclipsed the former in that everybody got their fair start and consequent chance, and that the first part of the run was over the better portion of the line. The run of to-day was a crucial test of men and horses, and a splendid sample of what Leicestershire is when a good fox and a good scent put it fairly on its merits.

At one o'clock on Saturday Ranksboro' Hill was crowned by much the same quality and quantity as had skirmished round

the Orton Wood ten days previously—a mass of which each component item, whether of sex rude or gentle, was bent on playing its individual part actively and vigorously should occasion serve. A flat and unfortunate morning had damped their ardour no whit; and not even when the pack had spent a fruitless three-quarters of an hour in the famous gorse did they give up hope. They knew they had the best and the lightest of the woodlands before them; that the day was of the dullest and stillest, and so of the likeliest kind; and that the afternoon was yet in full youth and promise before them. So they did their duty by the portmantillos that in these days of comfort and good sense fill up the small of each belted second horseman's back, sent home the morning mount with the pleasing thought that he ought to “come Monday” (as the oracle of the stable will term it), and lit the midday cigar with very fair complacency. Neal's horn called the ladies out of covert; steeds were set moving, and elbows were squared for the balance-jog that means covert-to-covert pace. But *huic holloa! huic holloa!* Whence the scream that brings all up with a round turn? *Away* it is at the top! By Jove, the rascal has stolen off the moment he deems the coast is clear! Better for his sleep to-night had he waited but five minutes more. Hounds are over the hill and on to his tracks ere many seconds are passed; and the scene that just before was placid as a missionary meeting is now all bustle, hustle, and excitement. Over the brow tear the hunt in a fever of eagerness, in a whirlwind of excitement. No one means to be left behind to-day; and hounds suffer in consequence. The sun shines out brightly for a time; the scent is catchy, and flickering; and a hundred men are pressing on the back of the pack who only want a little room and a little time to settle. Hounds catch the wild infection from the horsemen, and dash into the scent with a fling that again and again carries them over the mark. ‘Ten minutes of this undisciplined eagerness, and then comes a three minutes’ check. Now on again, fast enough to make it necessary to canter and to jump, where on the good

Tuesday previous there had been the fastest galloping. Field for field, almost fence for fence, the fox repeats his course of that day. But they are not hurrying him now, and of this part of the run it need merely be added that in about forty minutes the Punchbowl has been passed, Burrough Hill swarmed, and the field are hovering on its edge, clustered exactly where they cluster once yearly, on the natural grand stand of the Melton Steeple-chase Course. Burrough village is half a mile away, and clear across the green pastures below comes the shrill view holloa, telling that reynard has put the valley between him and his pursuers. But the holloa that announced his presence was uttered right in his face, and has turned him back down the hill. Another holloa rings out from the vale below; Neal gallops to the spot, hounds are turned rapidly to his horn just as they reach the village, and he is able to lay them on afresh, gaining a vital five minutes on his fox.

Now then my story may really be said to commence. Take all the above as introductory. Gallop your best down from Burrough village from the hounds, and start with them as they take up the line hard by the winning field of the Steeplechase Course; send old Pegasus down the hill as fast as his shoulders will carry him; delay not a moment, if you would see hounds again to-day. Reckon not yourself safe on the higher ground, and take your way through the village, or, with Colonel Forester and several others good and bold, you may spend your afternoon in vexation and to-morrow's Sabbath in sorrow. Ah, 'tis different work now to what has yet been done to-day! The vigour of a breast-high scent, the dash of pace, the thousand delights of an exciting burst, were wanting before. Now they are present, full and powerful in their influence; and the man whose heart does not burn and whose brain does not whirl with the glorious ecstasy is too phlegmatic for foxhunting, and ought to have been born a Bourbon. The sun has hidden his head, the air is sharp and still and frosty; the grassy meadows under foot are noted for their scent-carrying power, and hounds fly over them now like wildfire. The turf, aired by days of

easterly winds, and unsodden by the rotting influence of frost, rides firm and elastic ; the fences are such as a good bold horse loves ; and a couple of hundred riders are sweeping the country before them. Θελω λεγειν 'Ατρειδας. For three days I have been thinking over this run and its many incidents, and for three nights have been dreaming over them, till the fog of excitement has cleared away, and the whole scene and its actors stand out vividly, as if moving on the paper before me. May my pen, for this once at least, have readiness, and do them justice ! For the moment, it seems to me I am watching the eager pack breasting the ascent above "the brook," taking the ridge-and-furrow at a laborious angle. Captain Coventry, on Patch, with Lord Grey de Wilton and Captain Farley, are leading the right-hand division, Captain Jacobson and Mr. Tomkinson the centre, and Lord Carington and a strong party on the left. Thus over the old stake-and-bound on the summit, and here is Adam's Gorse but a field below. But the pack bear sharp to the left ; so make the best of the four-railed timber and the ditch that opposes you. The top bar looks as if it would crack, and, besides, hounds are really running now. Two handy gates at the corner of the field take you with the cry. A third there is, too—and a fatal one for the leaders on the right, who turn through it, are cut off from the chase, and give it up in Twyford village. Hounds are still leaning to the left—two trying bottoms have to be flown—the water fenced at the one by timber, the other by blackthorn. So up the rising ground, and here we are at the gravel pit, whither the Quorn scurried to ground some weeks ago. The earths are sure to be open in this foreign land; and 'tis a million to one our fox has taken the refuge offered him. Yes, there can be no doubt about it ! The pack have dipped into the pit, and the foremost horsemen pull up with ejaculations of disappointment and chagrin—when a single hound springs on to the bank, speaks to it above, dashes through the hedge beyond, and calls her comrades after her :

Yes ! No !
Why ! by jo !
Sold ! sold

you could yell joyfully as did Mark Twain's miner, whose dead comrade turned up in the stranger treating him at the bar. You can hardly believe in such luck ; but you mustn't stay to chuckle. Pop over the greasy hogbacked stile at once, and you will be in time to witness the finest sight that ever met you even in this hard-riding country—a scene that Ackerman's window could scarcely rival. You have heard, reader, that the bosom of Leicestershire is being scarred and seared by railways crossing it in every direction. Some of them are near completion ; others are only planned, like American cities in their early youth in forest and prairie—marked out by double rows of high and thick oak rails that have hitherto been held as verging on the unjumpable. But they might be hurdles now instead of unbreakable timber varying between four and five feet high ; for a dozen men, choosing the firmest spots on the old ridge-and-furrow that, yet uncut by the desecrating spade, runs at right angles across the projected railway, are flying in and out almost abreast. Lord Carington leads them over on the left, Mr. Tomkinson on the right, while the Marquis of Huntly, Messrs. Frewen, Whyte Melville, Flower, Pryor, and Russell, Lords Wicklow and Wolverton, Captain Jacobson, and the huntsman, solve the double difficulty almost together. No fall, and scarcely a rail touched by iron or rattled by hoof. You would have wagered there were not so many timber jumpers in the county. But 'tis wonderful what virtues are brought out of horses and men when hounds really run ! And now they are streaming down the only two fields of plough to be met with from Burrough Hill to Owston, and cut the road in the Twyford valley half a mile to the left of that village. The brook is just in front ; but the pack turn along its banks for the present and point their heads for Owston. Captain Jacobson cleverly crosses the water by the road, hits off the bridle road beyond, and so escapes the dangers in store for the rest of the party. On over the grass at the same quick determined pace. Are we not truly, gloriously, embodying the spirit of the "Dream of the old Meltonian," whose

THE NEW RAILWAY ONCE MORE.



stirring lines in last month's *Baily* will wake responsive echoes in every heart that beats under scarlet? Are we not riding to its truest illustration now in "this bright and happy gallop from Ranksboro' Gorse?" On, on,

. . . . For the bitches are racing before us—
Not a nose to the earth—not a stern in the air;
And we know by the notes of that modified chorus
How straight we must ride if we wish to be there!

Forrard along the brookside. There's no country to compare with the wild pastures of Twyford and Owston. Take your fences *anywhere*, gentlemen. There's room for half a dozen whole hunts to compete over such a line; and there are not a dozen of you here altogether. Heavens, what's this? Surely not the new railway once more? It is though; for the lines of reynard and railway have again converged. Providence has been tempted already—you won't try her again? Oh, agony, hounds are slipping away hand over hand, and they have led you to this infernal impediment a second time. Look right and look left, there's no way out of it! "A fall's a hawful thing!" said the best of lecturers, and the quotation rises unbidden to your lips as the situation strikes desperate. "Come up, old boy, neck or nothing!" and Mr. Tomkinson rides uphill at what this time looks a sheer five feet—the ridge and furrow lying horribly crossways, and a fresh-cut trench beyond the timber. "Ashby's" infirmity is no lack of jumping power. The old horse lands with a grunt, and scuttles over the opposite barricade with another, whisking his tail merrily as he leaves them behind. Lord Huntly bucks over them ten yards higher up, so does Mr. Frewen—floundering, but recovering on the best of shoulders as he knees the wooden wall beyond. Lord Manners is in with a flourish, and Mr. Pryor with a somersault, while the navvies cheer and holloa as if they were at Astley's. Lord Carington, Messrs. Whyte-Melville and Russell have meanwhile turned over the brook at a likely place—only to encounter the railway difficulty at another spot. The first-named—who, if I mistake not, is riding the

chesnut Alonzo—gives the other two the office, gallantly sustained by both, the Australian four-year-old of the last-named doing credit to his bush training. Lord Wicklow and Lord Wolverton, luckier still, take the brook also before reaching the railway the second time, and hit off a comforting set of draw-rails in the barrier. But what of those on the left—taking the track of the hounds, though no forwarder than their comrades a hundred yards away? Do you follow me, reader? The pack turn sharp over the brook immediately, at a place, to continue with Mr. Bromley Davenport (would that he could have been there in the flesh and in the old bold spirit!),

No shallow-dug pan with a hurdle to screen it,
That cocktail imposture the steeplechase brook ;
But the steep broken banks tell us plain, if we mean it,
The less we shall like it the longer we look.

Mr. Tomkinson and Mr. Frewen fly it together, but the next comer lands in their footmarks, to find hind legs slip suddenly from under him—a flounder, a desperate rear-up, and a backward splash! My word! isn't the water cold? Mr. Flower takes his plunge at about such a distance away as one bathing machine would be from another. Neal is for the moment to be seen looking for a place to get in, and for some time afterwards for a place to get out.

Closing in nearer together, the still diminishing party sail on—each horse doing his utmost, and each rider straining to lessen his distance from the flying ladies. The latter are still glancing along in a cluster—no tailing or stringing to-day, but the whole one compact and hurrying mass. 'Tis fortunate the fences are easy; for horses are beginning to chance them terribly. Crack and crash rattle the accompaniment of every jump. Mr. Tomkinson is down now, the good horse lying prone and helpless in a ditch. He moves not, nor does he struggle; but his head sinks, his throat gurgles, and his eyes close. "Poor Ashby, he's gone! there never was so good a horse! Had I not breasted Burrough Hill he would have been travelling still. Well, there's no help for it!"—and, removing

his saddle, the tearful owner is about to trudge his weary way on foot, when up jumps Ashby with a gasp and a whinny, apparently as lively as ever. Two fields further on Lord Wolverton is leading, and soon afterwards standing over, his horse. "Are you beat?" cries Mr. Whyte-Melville as he struggles onward. "Yes, George," answers his lordship with wondrous cheerfulness; "you must give me the finish over our claret! Five hundred, though, I'd give for a horse!" "Here you are, my lord—fresh as a daisy and can jump anything," promptly responds Mr. Childs of the George Hotel, proffering his twenty pound hireling. Lord Manners is also walking round his chesnut in the middle of a field, but the operation seems to possess some potent charm, for soon he is remounted and the horse going again with all his former vigour. Mr. Frewen is now nearest the pack, and shouts loudly as he drops deep into a watering-place beyond a dark high bullfinch. But the Australian (I mean Mr. Russell) is not to be denied, plunges after him, and the two continue their career in safety. The others shape their course a trifle to the right. Horses are sobbing and choking, and if the fox is not killed soon 'tis certain they will be. Owston Wood is only two fields away; but reynard is so sore pressed he will never gain it. Turning from it he passes to the right of Owston village, and toils on as if to reach once more the gorse from which he started. But hounds are too close and hot upon him to allow of that. They have been driving him along unmercifully and unhesitatingly for upwards of thirty minutes; now they are almost on him, when for his last chance he rolls into a ditch, crouches close till the pack have dashed over him, then crawls back under the thorns, and so saves all that exhaustion has left of his life when half a mile from Knossington. Hounds of course throw up baffled—bristling and eager for blood that was almost in their mouths. But the brook, the pace, and a fall or two besides have completely worsted the huntsman's horse, though boldly and keenly ridden; and there is no one to help them to their sinking prey. In vain they throw themselves forward and round, till five

minutes afterwards the first whip arrives, leading his horse. When Neal takes them in hand the chance, or rather the certainty, has been lost ; and though twenty minutes later he hears of his fox crawling and lying down half a mile away, the information leads to no result. Some thirty-five minutes was the final burst, let me repeat, and the run one hour and twenty-five. So as grand a fox as ever faced the open lived for another day. Let us hope he found a warm shelter for his stiffened limbs and wearied frame that night.

If you will look over the names, reader, with which I have made so free, and count up those to whom no accident befell, you will reckon but seven or eight as the number who "lived" and rode the run. First to join these before the end were Custance and Sir Beaumont Dixie.

Now my story is finished. I trust it is clear ; I believe it is accurate (so far as an individual may assume to relate all of a general action), but I wish it had been written by the gallant author, who was one of the foremost throughout—the only man in England who can really write a run. Certain it is that Ranksboro's laurel wreath holds no fairer sprig than the gallop of Saturday, Jan. 13, 1877.

Oh, glory of youth ! consolation of age !
Sublimest of extasies under the sun !
Though the veteran may linger too long on the stage,
Yet he'll drink a last toast to a foxhunting run.
And oh ! young descendants of ancient top-sawyers !
By your lives to the world their example enforce ;
Whether landlords, or parsons, or statesmen, or lawyers,
Ride straight, as they rode it from Ranksboro' Gorse.

SEASON 1877-78.

A PREFACE TO THE SEASON.

NOVEMBER 1ST, 1877.



NLY an introductory preface, perhaps; only a prelude to still better things, possibly — but

fifty minutes over the grass and a kill in the open, to stir your blood and to make you a greater slave than ever to the chase ! Did you start anxious of your nerve, fearful that your summer's run had indeed left you a year older, and that this might be *the year* which brings that crisis of a riding life which now and again you see dropping so suddenly, unexpectedly, and irretrievably on better men than you ? You come home, feeling that your veins had never coursed more rapidly, that your spirit never rose more delightedly to the cry of a racing pack, that there does (as you often declared before, even to the unbelieving) exist a pleasure that excels the sweetest vices in life, and leaves an after-taste that has no regret.

A little spinney on a still grey afternoon—after a morning that had shown only how Scraughton Gorse was again full of

foxes, and that Scrauptoft Hall has lost nothing of its hospitality.

An old fox, and away in view, grass on every side, and a decision just out of your lips that your horse is short of condition, and that you would go home. Go home *now* if you can, and when you get there burn your saddles and sell your horses, for your day is past, and it is time you left Leicestershire. Twenty couple of clear-throated ladies are calling you on, and ten acres of turf are stretching before you. Ten acres more, and you have forgotten all about home and all about condition. You are living in the present, and you are revelling in a scene that has no parallel upon earth. The spinney (of Humberstone) is a mile behind, and the deep-banked brook that runs below it is only too evident before you. Over the fence to the right, and you are still with the hounds, but yet behind the water. But gallop for the ford in front, and you will be elbowed off quite three fields to the left. Will, the first whip, finds a place where broken rails give a plain fly. Firr and Capt. Middleton get over a hundred yards to the left—so does Lady Florence Dixie—and the flying pack are glancing alongside the rivulet at a pace that tells plainly of the scent. So on for a mile or two, then the brook has to be flown again, as the hounds lean away for Scrauptoft. Oh, why will sheep not stand still when the hunt bursts upon them? If you stop for an explanation to a question such as this, you will stop till your place is beyond recovery—if not till your hair grows white. Hounds whimper right among the silly bewildered flock; but Firr has quickly grasped the position, and cuts off a corner as he lifts them forward. Cold fallow fields cannot stop them now; and, thank Heaven! the plough is not deep enough yet to stop a horse that has any blood and bone to lay claim to. The garden of Scrauptoft Hall has many a time been Reynard's recreation ground; but there is no child's play for him to-day. Through the laurels and past the plantations below is the line, and a rapid one. The Scrauptoft Brook is not a big one, though oftentimes a terror in the distance; and

nearly all the small field swing over it, and go on well pleased with themselves ; for the sheep and an inside place have let well-nigh everyone up again. To Thurnby Spinney but not into it. Merrily on past it, with fences that tempt you to jump, and a green spring board under your feet. A blind ditch now and then, that might swallow your horse had he time to blunder, and black hedges that make him rise as if at a wall. Piercing straight into Mr. Tailby's country, a second little covert (has it a name?) is passed in full career. A minute more, *yonder* he goes only two fields to the good, and the bitches all bristling for his blood. But he is not caught yet ; and still they dash on with the notes of death spurring him forward. Here is Little Stretton, and here are all the villagers rushing madly out, hats and bonnets in the air, and Bulgarian yells in their throats—"Ye'-taallyho!" the old familiar stirring sound. Up a single hedgerow, and boldly over the open field. "Loo-loo-loo!" and, snapping at his foes, the old fox rolls over game to the last. Now you may jump off, loose your girths, loose your tongue, talk like a fool if you wish ; for every moist red face around you is radiant with sympathetic, exuberant joy.

A right honest sporting run it was, hounds doing nearly all of themselves and by themselves. It couldn't all be fast, but most of it was, and the country was perfect, while the field was almost a miniature one for our (shall I say?) *too* popular county. A pretty find, a handsome run, and a brilliant finish —would you ask for more ? And among those who went home satisfied I think I may venture to give the names (in addition to those leading ones already written) of the Master and Miss E. Webster, Miss Paget, the Messrs. Barclay, Captain Henry, and other Captains, Gibsone, Grimston, King, etc. ; Lord Castlereagh, Messrs. Johnson, Warner, Cradock, and Thorp—Melton being as yet but scantily represented.

KIRBY GATE 1877.

Not merely as an annual opening meet does the Quornite look upon Kirby Gate. It is a notch in the calendar of his existence—a yearly resumption of old ties—a gathering up of threads that have grown yet stronger while relaxed—the renewal of a taste so firmly planted that no temporary abstinence can shake it. It is an opportunity for revolving the little bit of philosophy that every man carries, or thinks he carries, in his mind; but better and more opportune than any such philosophy—shallow as it is, perhaps, and certainly misty, gloomy possibly, and most likely illogical—are the hearty greeting, the outspoken welcome, the friendly grip, and the truthful eye that mark many a brief but heart-warming episode at Kirby Gate.

This Kirby Gate *réunion* of Monday, November 5, 1877, was held on a bright sunny morning that must have gladdened the scene even to men whose business instincts bade them moan the sad incompatibility of sunshine and scent. It was in truth a holiday gathering, in which even a photographer claimed to take an active part, and at which even bicyclists asserted their right to assist. In conveyances and chaises galore the lambs of Leicester mustered strong, with hampers and wine baskets; while, that it might not be behindhand with its sister town, Melton had sent forth (*mihi crede, comes*) a newborn babe with its bottle! So the road was crammed four deep with carriages, and the green sward opposite the old hall held horsemen to a number that exceeded (it was allowed) all former years.

That all who care may know which of our visitors have already joined, let me take this occasion to give a probably imperfect list of those present on Monday. Surely no more welcome form was there than that of Mr. Little Gilmour, who reckons his Kirby Gate meets almost by the score, and attends each one with a freshness and zest depicted on his kindly face that the youngest of us may envy. Besides him, and besides

the youthful representative mentioned above, there came from Melton Sir Beaumont and Lady Florence Dixie, Lord James Douglas, Sir John Lister Kaye, Sir Meysey Thompson, Colonel and Miss Markham, Captain and Mrs. Candy, Captain and Mrs. Stirling, Mr. and the Misses Chaplin, Captains Boyce, Middleton, Wingfield, Smith, and Brocklehurst; Messrs. F. Behrens, Younger, Frewen, Parker, L. Flower, and the most evergreen of hard riders, Mr. Grey. Lord Castlereagh was there from Keythorpe, Lord Manners and Miss Manners from Quenby, Captain and Mrs. Clayton and Captain Jacobson from Oakham, and Mr. Powell from Billesdon; while of local residents Mr. Coupland, the master, of course was present, and with him Miss Webster and Mrs. H. Webster. Among many others there were Sir F. Fowke and Mr. F. Fowke, of Lowesby; Captain and Miss Hartopp, of Dalby; Colonel Burnaby, of Baggrave; Mr. Cheney, of Gaddesby; Mr. Brooks, of Barkby; Miss Paget, Mr. and Mrs. E. Chaplin, of Brooksby; Mr. Hassall, of Rearsby; Captain King, of Kirby; Messrs. Craddock, E. Warner, L. Johnstone, and worthy sportsmen and sportswomen to an indefinite number.

From the meet to Gartree Hill, the orthodox and accepted draw, is an honest and not altogether unpleasant three miles —honest at all events as regards distance, and pleasant very if you are diplomatic enough to secure a desirable place in the caravan. To change your company in the narrow lanes is an impossibility, though here and there in the route an open field may grant you a variety of companionship if you wish it, and a let-off to your horse's exuberance. It might have been May as to weather, and there was certainly all the romping hilarity of a May day evident in the boisterous eager steeds.

Gartree Hill reached at last. There was, as on like occasions for years past, the summit crowned with a black mass of sympathetic foot-people, who, from their point of vantage, commanded, not only the covert that slopes down its side, but the level plain that, in the full ugliness of plough, stretched away to the left, and in the full beauty of grassy pasturage

merged into the Burton Flat in front, while the steep heights of Dalby stood imminent on the right.

There were lots of foxes, and lots of shouting as two or three of them broke away in view. Hounds left at the bottom, and the light fences below gave opportunity to many a man to learn a new horse, or even to recall the feeling of a saddle. For in cases not few the knickerbocker has of late been more familiar than the buckskin, and legs that last year seemed moulded for the top have recently been proudly swelling under the stocking, and now rebelled painfully against their tight imprisonment.

The chase that began and ended on the Dalby Manor had but few features; and so we may pass on to Sir Francis Burdett's covert, where holloas were already resounding, and where we arrived to learn that a fox had already broken and been headed back. Ten minutes elapsed; the bright sun had veiled its face in some welcome clouds, and the field, by this time reduced from its holiday dimensions to a workman-like cadre, ranged itself in the road. Some men ate their lunch, some changed their horses, some kept an ear open, some did not; but all began at last to fancy that Reynard meant to leave them in quiet possession of the open country. A mild holloa, no one knew whence, roused them only by degrees to a sense of the changing situation; but the signal was so faint, and the summons so undecided, that for some moments the mass remained inert and inactive. Fortunately for them the pack too were all abroad in a bad scenting covert, and the huntsman had but a single and roundabout egress. But, when once he laid hounds on, they rose the hill quickly for Dalby House, and no one could complain of loss of start or loss of chance. For a minute or two again the pursuit hung as the fox doubled in a slender belt of plantation. Once free from this, he started, with hounds close at him, for the Punch-bowl, that offered its tempting shelter only half a mile away. But he wanted no harbour yet, and asked only for a fair field and a clear course. So, whisking round the left of the Punch-

bowl Hill, he carried the hunt so quickly, that three-quarters of the field climbed the eminence, only to find themselves left completely in the lurch ; but they had still another chance given them, for he was met close to Somerby village, and driven back almost into their faces. Thus everyone was "in it," as a momentary check took place where Mr. Clifford Chaplin's house overlooks the beautiful Burrough and Twyford feeding grounds—a country that we hereabouts are wont not only to speak of as *our* best, but to boast of proudly as the *best in England*. It was over this grassy arena that the Cottesmore had their two memorable runs last season, and it is over this that the Quorn have never failed to gallop with a burning scent whenever a good fox has thrown down his gauntlet upon it. A field of turnips crowns the hill ; a flight of hurdles makes dashing riders of us all, and fifty men are in among the hounds ; but turnips, nor hurdles, nor over-riding belong to the twenty minutes that is in front. Hounds extricate themselves like eels from the crushing mob around them, and glide suddenly and swiftly into the valley beneath. Two small fences are almost swept away by the charging lines of horsemen ; but the steep dip soon breaks the ranks, for man must have nerve and horse must have shoulders to gallop down here. You must have him in hand, or how will you negotiate the boggy jump awaiting you below ? and you must not check him or you are at once a field behind. Solve the difficulty as best you may, and according as you are on terms with yourself and your mount. And let us suppose you are not the lady whose horse has sunk on his side in the quagmire, nor that, like these two gallant sportsmen, you are up to your knees in the mud, with your horse lying girth-deep on the post-and-rails that you had proposed he should jump. No ! a double on and off a hedge-topped bank has saved you from the slough ; but you are none too near the merry Quorn bitches as you take a firm hold on the bridle, and push up the trifling ascent in front. An open gate serves a turn here, and now there is nothing between hounds and the covert of worshipful John o' Gaunt but the

Twyford Brook and a fair hunting country. Fitt is as happy as a king as he cheers to the flying head : and who is there, tell me, of that little vanguard who would exchange places with any man or woman in the empire ; for has not the saddle moments such as a woolsack could never give nor even a throne aspire to ?

Wide yawns the fence in front, with its thorn-guarded ditch, its stiff-growing binders, and the stout white rail beyond. But the pace is terrific, and the leaders are not likely to stop at aught that looks possible. Down hill they race at it. Custance has covered it in his stride ; but right and left of him there is a crashing of timber. Yet no fall that we can see. Each jump requires a hunter ; but each horse seems equal to the occasion, for the turf rides firm and light, and galloping has none of the toil of last year's experience. Captain Brocklehurst is very prominent on the grey : Mr. Powell is thrusting along with all his old Harborough fire ; Captain Smith is in his usual form ; Captain Middleton in his accustomed place ; Mr. Frewen is "all there" also ; and Lady Florence Dixie is not to be beat. Mrs. Webster is turned over by a top-binder that stubbornly refuses to yield even to her ; but Captain Candy is on his feet, and both are back in their saddles so quickly that scarcely any ground is lost. The Twyford Brook is neared, as hounds hang for one second at a gateway ; but starting on afresh, in an instant the water has become a necessity. There is little of the glistening element now, for the autumn has been a dry one, and rushes and mud have almost a monopoly of its bed. And to this probably thanks are owing that twenty people are straightway over without a fall, and with only a scramble here and there. With the chilly memory of more than one immersion, we came down at it as if to charge the Bosphorus, only to find that horse after horse skimmed it with a contemptuous indifference such as they are little prone to when the stream is brimming level with its banks.

It must soon be John o' Gaunt or a finish now ; and the hounds mean that finish to be a kill, for one and all are running

as if intent on blood. *Ware Wire!*—that horrid sound from which our ears have this season as yet been free! Good farmers, good friends, who give us our hunting, give us also our lives! Forget not that the 1st of November is past, and open not the door of welcome with a snare still set that was never meant for us! The good honest oak-rail oxer yonder, that floors one of the leaders already named, offers, as it were, but a friendly nudge compared with the deadly check of the cold and murderous iron, which gives no warning and gives no quarter. Sydney Smith (who, by-the-bye, had about as much right to descant upon “equitation” as your humble servant upon astronomy) gave it as the result of his experience that a fall was not a thing to be afraid of, for that he “always got up after one, like the Three-per-Cents, not a bit the worse for it.” But then Sydney Smith never got a cropper over wire when going fast over hard turf; his own misadventures being confined to the boundaries of his Yorkshire parish, and being usually brought about by his cob turning a corner with him rather quicker than he expected.

The oxer legitimate aforesaid is into the field adjoining the hamlet of Marfield, and the third only from the covert ahead. Some carters in the road have stopped our fox when close to his goal; the pack turn short with him, but an open drain has saved him, and a stirring gallop is over. Twenty-seven minutes they made it, timing it from the moment of passing the Punchbowl; and thirty-five may be taken as comprising the whole, from Sir Francis Burdett’s Covert.

A SCENT ON THE PLOUGH.

THRUSINGTOM WOLDS is a snug little wood. Foxes are fonder of it, I fancy, than are pursuers; for most of us have some sore memory linked with it—of how we have here been entangled, and lost some run that we had fully meant to see.

First horses and empty sandwich cases had just been sent home, hounds had just been thrown into covert, when, more promptly than often happens, even from so small a woodland, Reynard was signalled away at a point where all might have a start. Brightly and quickly hounds struck out after him as he set his head at first for the better country of Shoby and Lord Aylesford's; but after two minutes—much of which seemed spent in the air, for the neatest of flying fences came close and frequent—the course turned at a sharp angle to the left, and carried us into a district whose system of culture we knew too well. So crossing Mr. Coupland's own farm, hounds ran on as fast as horses could well move through fallows specially prepared by last night's rain to receive and to hold them. The old Fosse road was cut to the right of Ellars Gorse, and over a few fields of grass the pack left their followers behind, the lost ground having to be made up where the local stream runs under a thick and forbidding curtain of blackthorn. Willoughby village also remained on the left. Plough still, and plough again, hounds now working their way slowly, now dashing on with a sudden rush, but always untouched, and always making the most of such a scent as was meted to them. The close of half an hour found them nearing the first of the Widmerpool Coverts. In twenty minutes more they were at the overhanging plantations near Bunny; horses now standing still all over the country. Lady Florence Dixie's fell, apparently blown, and it is feared her collarbone was broken. Mrs. Henry came to more harmless grief, probably from the same cause. Dirty coats and trotting steeds could scarcely be called exceptional. Here was one man punishing his horse, who perhaps never needed punishment before, at a gap over which he might almost have walked; there was another hauling at his bridle in the endeavour to raise a fallen steed too blown to struggle to his feet; and there was a pair of Bartley's tightest, on Sunday unwrapped for our special admiration from their silver tissue covering, now hobbling ungracefully through the vulgar mire. On the pack pressed their sinking quarry into

and through the coverts of Bunny, and drove him over the open park. With hanging tongue and drooping brush he made for the lodge gate ; looking up helplessly, almost protestingly, at the farmer, who had only to trot alongside of him. But the softest of us are bloodthirsty at such a moment. It is the end of a fair fight ; fox and hounds are the contending parties ; we have cast in our lot with the hounds, and their victory is at the moment the death of a common foe. The master reserved the head, a proud trophy, to the honour of his pack ; Captain Middleton pocketed his brush ; Major Robertson carried off a pad, and the three others were quickly seized by one or other of the little party. I may be omitting someone ; but I may name (in addition to Firr and Fred the whip) Captain Sherbrook, Lord James Douglas, the two Messrs. Story, Messrs. Sykes and White, Miss Paget, Captain Campbell, and Mr. Martin, as close up. The distance from find to finish of the run was eight miles of direct measurement.

But the morning, too, was all fun, and varied fun—in a fairer arena, moreover. Ratcliffe-on-the-Wreake, it should be told, was the meet ; and footpeople by hundreds, and lurchers and terriers by dozens, assembled to see Cossington Gorse drawn. They were a manageable mob, though ; and so a good fox was allowed to cross the road in view of all, and to set his mask for the Hoby country, which I have aforetime belauded so often. Hounds did not get away on good terms ; but in four fields they appeared to be settling to run, and then the Ragdale Bottom blocked the way—a great hairy cavernous ravine, the banks of which were lost in brushwood and rank-growing grass. New-built drains intersected the approach and prevented anything like a direct charge, though there were those out than whose rush the tread of angels is not more daring. Firr scrambled in and out where the lately-laid pipes cut into the main gulf, and in a style that would have delighted Captain Thomson's heart. Captain Smith, Mr. Grey, and Mr. Warner got a clean and successful run at it a little lower on the right ; Captain Candy found a clever place to the left, and

near to him a wide spot was flown by Mr. Cart and Sir Beaumont Dixie. Others disappeared from sight as the result of bold endeavour. Captains Boyce and Middleton were very soon with the party; and hounds took them pleasantly on over this superb country till they lost at the village of Hoby.

But I have written enough on this good Monday. It boots not to dwell upon how Mr. Grey was caught and shaken by a wire, at which the farmer of the land himself was on the point of riding, thinking his orders for its removal had been obeyed. Nor to picture the plight of one of the gallant captains aforesaid, whose horse, baulked by another as he took off at a difficult brook, carried him into a tree and there hung, for all the world like the Golden Fleece—the simile, of course, referring to the horse, not, as personal friends might surmise, to the bold lancer. Of course each one volunteered his jest about one who had so often tempted Providence being at last “up a tree;” but all heard with pleasure that the good horse, after hanging long, with head and shoulders dangling over the water, and groaning bitterly, was safely sawn out of his perilous perch.



THE WHISSENDINE.

THE feature of the week—perhaps the run of the season, certainly the event of November, '77—was the run of Saturday last, the 17th ; so let all else stand over, and minor chronicles remain untold, till at least in sober black and white shall be written the story that memory's pages alone may carry in befitting letters of red.

Stapleford Park has various coverts, copses, and spinnies ; but the best-known and staunchest of them all is Laxton's Covert. Thence we started for this fine gallop ; thence have we seen many a sterling chase before, and thence may we hope to see their like again—at least, so long as Major Claggett can give us foxes gallant and bold as the one we galloped to death to-day, and the one that the Cottesmore bitches so fairly ran into in the open in March last.

Bearing in mind that readers at a distance are as a thousand to one against those in the neighbourhood of the scene, and hundreds to one even against those who have ever been on the spot, the best endeavours of my humble pen shall be given to render the story clear.

Some half-dozen miles from Melton, then, and on a slight eminence lies Laxton's Covert—a most snug little gorse, half encircled and wholly hidden by sheltering pine trees. Below it runs the famous Whissendine—a name with which every hunting man is familiar, as linked with deeds of the past and with men like Lord Forester, Lord Waterford, and a generation of hard riders, of whom only Captain Ross and Lord Wilton survive, but whom Nimrod, Alken, and Ackerman have immortalised for us and our descendants. All around is classic ground ; and in the arena embraced within the points of Woodwell Head, Cottesmore, Ranksboro', and Melton every square yard of turf has sprung to the gallop of Giants of the past, of whose deeds we still speak reverently :

Where'er we tread 'tis haunted holy ground ;
No earth of thine is lost in vulgar mould,
The scenes our earliest dreams have dwelt upon,
Each hill and dale, each deepening glen and wold.

Two p.m., and so much of the day spent in little scurries, which in themselves had neither extent nor interest, till at length they culminated in the burst that is to be my topic. But as the preceding combats on the Douro always hold place in story as leading up to the greater Salamanca, so it is necessary to touch on the brief skirmishes on the valley of the Whissendine, which immediately foreran the event in question. If the day was half exhausted, the bright sunshine (of which this November has been as prolific as it has of sport) was wholly so, when the hunt was set going in Laxton's Covert. Away at the lower end, where the sluggish Whissendine takes its course, now running between firm and grassy banks, and a hundred yards higher or lower creeping, half-choked in sedge, betwixt boundaries uncertain and deceptive. Hounds crossed it where it was a fair and easy jump, though to the credit of the half-dozen men who took it in their stride, and still more to that of the one lady (Mrs. C. Chaplin) who flew it with them—none could say it was so, till arrived at its brink. The bridge, too, was close by; the road was crossed, and a large party cut the fences in pieces till a mile brought them to a little spinney on a second and more difficult brook, the Eye. Sir John Lister-Kaye, Mr. Grey, Captain Jacobson, and, I think, Captain Candy were promptly over it; but, finding they had somewhat anticipated matters, found themselves in the predicament of having to jump it back again, their retreat not being accomplished without the loss of half their party. Two foxes being afoot at this period, one of them ran the gauntlet back to Stapleford, hounds chasing merrily, and the crowd behind crashing heartily in their tracks. Then there was a furious ring round the great park—hounds on the inside, horsemen, almost without exception, taking the wider circle of the outside. Now they were back in Laxton's

Covert, and now was to begin the pith of the run and of the day.

For five minutes the field meandered or stood in pairs and groups without the covert, or in the narrow riding leading through it. Now and again the voice of the pack told that their game was before them ; but, baffled hitherto in their hopes, men were far from sanguine, and scarcely watchful.

Away once more over the Whissendine ! This time we leave on the right of the covert, two fields of plough hindering progress as we strain out to the holloa ; and the pack are over the brook as we turn from the crowded gateway, and leap into the meadow that bounds the water. Yes, you thought little of the water as you left it behind an hour ago ; and so you sit down in all confidence to drive at it the horse that made so light of it before. But it is wider and less encouraging here ; and, worse discouragement than all, Mr. Algernon Turnor's horse slides right in, struggles, plunges, but at length emerges on the other side. If evil example has power with us sinners, how much more has it ever with our equine friends ? Every horse is under a spell at once ; none dare fling themselves as a true water-jumper should ; but one and all fall short, either to scramble out with a second spring, or to roll backwards to their muddy destiny. "Keep straight, sir !" when you have picked your place under the good rule of "having it where you can't see the opposite bank." (If the precept is new to you, make a note of it, and bless *The Field*, whose recipes are so freely at your service.) But, though your spurs are your own and your longest, your steed your friend's and his best (or, maybe, your own and the greatest beast that you ever made-believe to be fit for good company), you share no better fate than your neighbours ; and if you only shuffle out on to dry ground as quick as Mr. Frewen or Captain Smith, you are lucky. The bed of the brook is fairly firm, the banks are low, and the water not deep ; but there is much wallowing and struggling, several men are in or down, and a lady is under her horse. You saw not the latter, so there is no reproach on your

chivalry. She is well attended, while in ignorance and bliss you do your utmost to make way through the two fallows that withhold you from the wide range of grass beyond. The party that has crossed the water as yet is but a small one. Mr. Grey joins them here, apparently from the clouds, possibly from the Eye. The crossfence has a ditch, hidden as a pitfall under a thick covering of grass and bramble. Surely, the ditches were never so blind as in this autumn of 1877 ! His little bay horse mistakes it for one of his native Northumbrian banks, essays to jump it on-and-off, only to be swallowed bodily and retained. Hard that this should happen when just embarking on the very line over which the good old sportsman showed the way to all his juniors a year ago.

But hounds have gained and riders have lost by the time the latter have emerged on to the first of the pastures, feeling relieved as men waking from a nightmare. Casting the last of the sticky mud behind them, they lance themselves over the open. The ants have raised hillocks all over the field, and rushy grass hides their ill-placed edifices. But are not hounds streaming away some three hundred yards ahead ? Have you not hit off your place in the fence that separates them from you, and even marked a likely spot in the one beyond ? Throw your heart in (though your presence be but imaginary) with the little party that are still "on terms," and let your horse thunder his best down the gentle slope. Hounds are running straight for Ranksboro', and the scent is breast-high. Neat blackthorn fences, or here and again a tempting rail, delay you less than them. A horseman, mufti-clad, is reining in across the path of the pack just as the van-leaders are fairly catching them. "Have you seen him, Timber?" is the shout as the figure of one of our best men is recognised. No, he has been travelling homewards in the pain of his bandaged leg, rendered helpless by an oxer a fortnight since. But pain and discretion are forgotten in the moment ; indeed, Providence might have chosen this happy means of curing him, for in three fences the crippled limb is well ! *

* Mr. Powell—*vide* Kirby Gate day previous.

But Reynard's eyes must have been sharper than our friend's, for he has threaded the corner here. Over to the right, where they have blocked the gap with sturdy faggots. Wide round the angle, where the two hedges join, if you would give hounds the room they want. Duck your head under the ash tree, thank your stars that that top rail is not a new one, and now you may gallop on with Ranksboro' still the point in front. Hounds are darting in single file through the stile, which forms the only and a slippery outlet through the next bullfinch ; and it must be in single file that pursuers follow—the wide footboard marking the take-off and ensuring each leap. Captain Jacobson is galloping up the other side, and unlatches in a twinkling a white gate into the first of the three roads, all of which lead from the west and south into the village of Whissendine, and all of which are crossed by the chase to-day. Over, again, into the broad meadows beyond ; just skirting the double post-and-rails that look like "a stopper," and welcoming the fair sporting obstacles that horses are not yet too blown to surmount. Here is the second road ; there is a countryman whose yell proclaims he has seen our good fox, and yonder are others whose view holloas tell that he has turned him to the left. Neal and Goddard come up, hounds are lifted with a view to saving time, and the run goes on, with Whissendine village still on the left. Road No. 3 brings up a great accession of numbers, while the men hitherto in position (as above recorded) are left at some disadvantage by the sudden turn. Twenty minutes, perhaps, from the covert to this point—a *sweet* twenty minutes, truly. Many horses are gasping already ; but there is much for them yet to do, and not a moment given to gather breath. Hounds are on again like greyhounds from the slips ; and over hill and dale race on till another quarter-hour has brought them to the verge of the Leicester and Peterborough Railway, just north of Ashwell—their fox not a hundred yards ahead. But a sinking fox can often make one last tremendous effort for his life ; the pack have not seen him, and scent often dwindles at such a time. The holloas that salute him as he rounds a farm-

house seem only to re-animate, and he has carried his bedraggled brush out of sight before huntsman or hounds have turned the corner of the building. But surely he must die soon, or horses will. Already all are "chancing" their fences alarmingly; while jumping is to some altogether an impossibility, and others find further proceeding out of the question. Double post-and-rails are a little terrifying at the best of times. Small wonder, then, that that crash means exhausted nature recumbent on the second flight; and inexhaustible pluck pulling a half-blown horse out of the ditch beyond. From the grass to the plough leads the next gate, and stiff timber shows the only opening to the field beyond. Two scrambles, one fall, then a refusal; and, lastly, a brave chesnut leaning in despair against the strong bars. This is the scene here. Four or five men follow the two Hunt servants, and pass the railway by handgates, for which Neal has a key. Reynard is still struggling on, but the hounds drive him from hedgerow to hedgerow, till they force him again over the railway, push him across half-a-dozen fields, and spring into some turnips almost with him. At last their heads are up. At last they catch a view. Fifty yards further, a scrambling, rumbling mass. *Who-whoop!* "They've got him!" *Who-whoop!* "Wish we could all dine together to-night!" *Who-whoop!* "Wasn't it a clipper?" "What a country!" "What a fox!" "Give me a bit of him, if only a pad—to smell when I feel low." *Who-whoop!* "What a week it has been!"

It took ten minutes to eat him, and half of that time to bring together even such a remnant of a big field as is comprised in the following names: Messrs. Powell, Westley Richards, J. Behrens, H. Lowther, Frewen, Brocklehurst, Wilder, W. and E. Chaplin, Custance, and Clayton, and Captains Smith, Boyce, Middleton, and Jacobson.

The time of the run was a matter difficult of exact attainment. Opinions differed widely as to when and whence this particular fox was started; but that the cream of the thing dated

from the moment of last leaving Laxton's Covert no one disputed ; estimates of this interval varying between *forty-seven* and *fifty-five* minutes. The precise number of minutes is of no real moment. It was a glorious run—for pace, for time, and for country ; creditable to hounds, satisfactory to huntsman, and delightful to those who rode through it. Find and finish, 'tis true, were not two very widely distant points—a measurement which many sportsmen will accept as the only criterion of the merits of a chase. But our fox bent his neck only when headed from his course to Ranksboro' as he passed Whissendine village ; and again, when dead beat, his last efforts carried him some two miles nearer home. Hounds were never at fault, and never off the line, except in the one instance of lifting them, as told above.

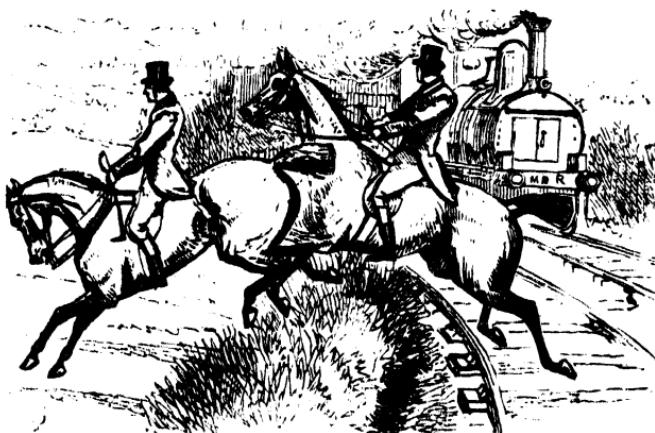
The only drawback to the day was that Mr. Flowers' horse broke his leg, and had to be destroyed : while a similar fate had befallen Lord Rossmore's mount in the course of the morning.

PERILS BY LAND AND WATER.

ON Friday, November 16th, the Quorn gathered under the elms of Brooksby Hall ; the old church, in sight of which Quornites have met for generations past, looking mournful—almost reproachful—under its recent visitation. Some three months ago it was struck by lightning ; and the spire, that has been a landmark for centuries, was split, riven, and broken. That the place is more or less one of county interest may be gathered from the following few facts. In the time of the Conqueror it became the demesne of the Countess Judith ; and was held by the Villiers family for upwards of five hundred years. Their most notable representative, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, was born here. In later times it was the seat of Lord Cardigan ; and “the Dandy” (who died after

swimming the Wreake) lies under one of the elms in front. Old Throsby, in his history of Leicestershire, says "Brooksby Church has a small spire, one bell, and a decent aisle." The present historian finds it to-day with a broken spire, a fallen bell, and a shattered aisle.

Sport and incident fully marked the day. Even the journey to the covert of Bleakmore and on to the Rearsby Spinneys was unique, if not altogether agreeable, as the towing-path (where double bridle gates occur every two or three hundred yards)



was chosen for the passage of a very large field. There were consequently a variety of prominent and interesting contingencies open to one, such as being caught in the pairs of gates, pushed into the river, or having one's leg broken by any of the many kickers who at once developed themselves under the opportunity. Then, when a fox broke from Rearsby Spinney, he took a line close parallel to the railway, tempted his pursuers on to it, having exactly calculated his time so that the midday express came screaming in upon them when irrevocably shut in. Firr and three or four others had literally to gallop for their lives; the woman at the level crossing lost her head, cut off their retreat, while screaming as loud as the engine; and the last two men only

escaped from the fact of their horses being bold enough to jump sideways out of the railway, the train within twenty yards of them.

Three minutes afterwards, hounds running fiercely, they came to the Wreake. The pack shook themselves on the opposite bank ; Lord Castlereagh jumped in ; and the stream at this point turned out to be so shallow, that his horse had only a few strokes to swim. Emboldened by his example, others found it quite fordable five yards to the right. Miss Paget earned the honour of being the first lady who ever rode across the Wreake ; and Mr. Coupland, Firr, Captain Candy, the Messrs. Lowther, and one or two others crossed almost dry. After running quick on to Cossington Gorse, a bob-tailed fox was soon hunted to death in the immediate neighbourhood. In the afternoon hounds were taken back to the Friday side of the river ; and from Queniborough Spinney there ensued a capital half-hour (with galloping and jumping galore) round by Barsby, Baggrave, and Humberstone to Barkby Holt, where the day ended. All hereabouts know how pleasant a district this is, with a quick-jumping horse and a fair scent—for turf is the only crop grown, and the fences are merely such as dairy farms require.

Monday, Nov. 26, contained another little flutter, which redeemed the day and saved us (and ten times more our most anxious master) from despondency. All Widmerpool, you may be surprised to hear, was drawn blank. No, its dependency, Kinoulton, held a fox, unsavoury even in death. Hounds declined him with thanks, and were taken on to Parson's Covert. Nothing alive here. Ditto, it appeared for a long and miserably cold time, at Curate's Gorse. But Firr drew it and redrew it ; a puppy now and again *squeaked* unechoed (obtaining only a *méntal* promise of whipcord) ; till, just as dull despair had established her throne, a “tallyho-back” sent a glow through each chilled and shivering frame. Men that a moment ago were looking absolutely ghastly and blue as in the last stage of cholera suddenly sprang to life and vigour ;

and a blush mantled o'er faces long callous to such a weakness, save under the generous promptings of Lafitte or fox-hunting. And, ye Heavens, how they all meant going when the crisis culminated in a swift scurry to Willoughby Covert! 'Tis a line that I, at least, do not remember to have ridden before. But it was an exhilarating and not too difficult a one ; and suited all ; for each and every one entered with all his strength into the spirit of the moment, and not one man but a hundred were to the front.

Half an hour at Willoughby Covert terminated Reynard's existence and the day's outing.

THE PINK WEDDING.

"THE Belvoir will meet at the House, Melton Mowbray, at 12 on Wednesday, Dec. 12," was the announcement. Spring is, happily, far away as yet. Why; then, the time and place? It was with a view to ushering a young pair, with all honours, into the springtime of wedded life. Melton and matrimony are not always and invariably in accord ; but for the nonce Melton placed itself under the leadership of its patron goddess in her duplicate capacity, and did homage at the shrine of Diana Lucina. Mr. C. Samuda led Miss Cecile Markham to the altar, attended by the presence and good wishes of such a bevy of "sportsmen in scarlet array" as has never graced a wedding before. Orange blossom in the foreground, fifty garments of newest pink in the background, surely even the old church of Melton never held so gay an assemblage! The bride Melton-born ; the bridegroom a Meltonian staunch, surely 'twas a fitting wedding, for two souls whose second common love is the chase. The Duke of Rutland in person graced the marriage and the meet. His departure with the hounds (to Mr. Burbage's covert) was practically cotemporary with that of

the newly-married pair to their train ; and they dashed by the covert just as the good fox faced the holiday footpeople, and just as the gay throng (on business now bent, but still bedecked with bouquets and favours) was pushing its way through the covert and ford.

A brave fox he was to face apparently the whole of the trade and labour of Melton, who, having feasted their eyes on the panoply of the wedding, had moved bodily on to the covert side, there to view as much more of the day's festivities as they could. In spite of the whooping, screaming multitude, whose cheers might have daunted even the brave defenders of Plevna, he buckled unhesitatingly to the task of doing his share to celebrate the day. A better scheme he could not have followed ; for he led the wedding guests a merry dance, where all could vent the cheerful effervescence of their feelings without jostle, hindrance, or check. Wide-spread to right and left, they dashed after the hounds—each man full of ride, the brave audacious, and the timid bold. The blackthorn bull-finches in their route caught the white favours of the plunging horsemen—and, holding them, looked as if they had broken out in blossom for the occasion. We have an old superstition in the Shire, that a new coat invariably means a cropper for the wearer ; and, of a truth, this day did nothing to dispel the belief. There were scores of new garments, and there were scores of falls ; for, as the run went on, men who had taken liberties with their horses at first, were prone to suffer for it ; and falls came thick and frequent—while from the passing train bride and groom snatched a glimpse of the moving panorama. It was a fifteen minutes burst to Berry Gorse, then more slowly to Laxton's Covert, where their fox had waited, after he had run a few yards along the banks of the Whissendine. The brook was at once a temptation irresistible. Men went for it as cheerfully as if Perrier-Jouet were still flowing before them, and larked over it in a dozen places. By-and-by they came back singly and more leisurely, as they could find a ford.

But away again soon for the village of Whissendine, past it (at a good hunting pace) nearly to Ranksboro', and round close to the Punchbowl. At the plantation known as Wheathills, there were two, if not three, foxes before them ; their run fox, dead beat, just eluded them, and hounds went on with another. Him they ran through Berry Gorse again, past Burton, and to ground half way between Melton and Great Dalby—*one hour and fifty-three minutes* of a continuous hunting run. The early part had been as fast and exhilarating as need be ; and most of it was done at a gallop, over the pleasantest grass country imaginable.

A NORTH WARWICKSHIRE CORNER.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 17TH.

AT Hilmorton Village, that men might hunt before they danced. A good run has often marked the day of the Rugby Hunt Ball ; but I at least never saw the date better celebrated than to-day ; and, if hunting gives way to other topics to-night, it will and must burst out wherever doorways have their tenants, walls their idlers, or the supper-room its devotees. It takes more than even dancing, more than even the grand passion, to knock a great gallop with hounds out of the thoughts of men, in whose minds its enchantment is still fresh.

Hounds came by train ; so did the Master ; and so did a strong proportion of the field—from Leamington, Coventry, Birmingham and elsewhere. Little time was given them to collect at the meet ; and thus many of them only reached Hilmorton Covert as holloas were resounding from each side and each corner.

Hilmorton Covert, readers who are strange to this part of the Midlands, is a five-or-six-acre thicket situated on a low grassy flat, almost midway between the Pytchley Coverts of

Crick and Lilbourne, and within a mile of the course over which the Grand Military Steeplechases have been so often (but are now, alas! no longer) run. It is quite a corner of the North Warwickshire country—and often a sweet “warm corner” has it proved.

If you are a stranger, of course you can't do better than follow the huntsman—if only you are decently mounted and your heart is half as hard as his. Again a holloa has sounded, on the north or Lilbourne side of the covert, and so the most remote from where you and he are standing. Wheatley is your guide's name, and he gives you no time to look at the hog-backed stile, with its wide foot board, that touches the right edge of the covert. Not even his lead through will avail to put you at once over the broken banked bottom and stiff black-thorn fence that meet you next. His horse comes round at the forbidding obstacle; but Mr. Wedge and his little brown fly the chasm in as good form as any deed of daring that you are likely to have seen done this season. Twenty yards lower down you may divide the impediment into an easier double jump; and now you are in the Watling-street road and pounding along, with your mind made up for Lilbourne and two miles on the flat. But hounds are bearing away from you; so stick close to the lead you have chosen and embark at once on the flat meadows to your left. There has not been rain enough to make them deep; you may gallop your best and the fences come in your stride. You are not half as near hounds as you ought to be; for that turn has rather shouldered you off, and they are flying up the wind with a clear half-field to the good of anyone. You may have crossed these very meadows in silk and cap; but you certainly never had to take tighter hold of your horse than now. And *then* they had picked the easiest place in the brook for you, and screened it with inviting thorns. Now you must take your chance, where you can reach it quickest—where Wheatley is landing, and one falls on either side of him. A low oak rail marks the take-off; but it is an honest sixteen feet fly. The young one luckily will bear

riding at it without getting flurried. His haunches are underneath him and his ears are cocked. Mr. Muntz's great weight-carrier is rushing alongside—giving confidence to you both. So everything is in your favour, save those two struggling splashing horses; but you are none the less thankful when the hindlegs strike again into firm turf and the water is behind you. Here and there, and everywhere for half a mile, are prostrate riders, rolling horses, swimming steeds, and dripping sportsmen. In thankfulness and with no discourtesy you may leave them to help each other; for have I not bade you, reader, leap and gallop at the huntsman's skirts. He'll take you in and out of that corner now, to save the deep wheatfield and regain the plough. His eye is on the pack, now bearing parallel to the brook; timber mustn't stop you; and your blood ought by this time to be heated to even oxer-jumping point. Tell me if you have had to go faster, or have ridden a sweeter line, this year, than in those sixteen or seventeen first minutes which bring you to the railway between Rugby and the village of Hilmorton, where a road cuts under the line of rail. Not very many of that huge holiday field were up at this moment. Captain Osborne had led the scurry throughout, Messrs. Raymond, Townshend, Marriott, and two or three other good men (whose names, I regret to say, are unknown to me), supporting him ably and closely. Judge of the pace, when I tell you that after two or three more fields their fox was in view—though the hounds themselves failed to catch sight of him. But he was honest, strong, and bold even now, though panting and faint with the severity of his starting efforts. As he crossed the Rugby and Hilmorton carriage road, some few light ploughs lessened the pressure of the pace; and so, though there was no real check, he was enabled to pull himself together again, and led them on for Barby. The pastures and the brook of Barby made another fast good portion of the run; then the chase checked a moment as it turned to the left under Barby and reached the banks of the canal, where the pack was well nigh broken up by a passing barge. On

again, over country as good as before, their fox ever close in front, and horses more often breaking than clearing their fences. At Kilsby Tunnel it seemed as if he had escaped to ground. Sympathy might, *then*, possibly have been with the fox. Now it must be full and hearty with the pack and with the huntsman ; for they have taken up the line once more, and a minute afterwards the death worry sounds almost on the doorstep of Mr. Cowley's house at Kilsby. A run of credit and of character, a glorious ride and a fox well killed. 'Tis thus at least that we may class it. The time from find to finish was *an hour* almost to a minute. The hounds did their work quickly, steadily, and prettily, one and all ; and Wheatley is evidently not only a good horseman but a good huntsman. May such a run precede many an annual Rugby Hunt Ball ; and may you and I, reader, see it, and ride over the water as gaily and successfully as we can on paper.

I dislike recording accidents, whether to man or his good beast ; but regret and sympathy prompt a note of the fact that Mr. Craven's horse broke his back at the Hilmorton brook.

A RELEASE.

ON Friday, January 25th, the country was placed under lock and key. Snow had fallen to the depth of an inch or so ; and with Saturday hope and company alike faded away. In many cases there must have been just a little touch of relief in the sigh, with which a battered stud was left in the hands of the groom and the vet, while the noble owner fled away to oblivion of blows and sprains and crippled favourites. For grooms were here and there at their wits' end (however deep that terminus might be, in own or master's judgment) ; vets were growing rich ; and even noble lords were now and again to be seen following the chase on wheels. For the strain has

not been slackened nor the pressure eased, except for one very brief interval, since cubhunting; and men are not prone to add to their stables when once many-fingered Christmas has poked its reminders into their mental ribs.

A balmy rain had fallen all Sunday night, and on Monday morning the Quornites assembled once more in what is essentially their "home country." A Friday with them is genial, stirring, and sociable. They invite all the world to join them; and very few of the world send excuse. A Cottesmore Tuesday is the same. Boisterous is the fun and glorious the crush on both days. But a Quorn Monday is quieter, more rational, and often more prolific of sport than either. The field is smaller. It consists almost entirely of men associated with, or attaching in some measure to, the Hunt. The instincts of jealousy or competition have little call for play. Over-riding is at a minimum; for men are not ever afraid lest the surging crowd should hem them in or crush them irrecoverably out of their place. Hounds of course, get a better chance, the huntsman fair play; and pursuing sportsmen do not ride in continued tremor of losing their turn, or that that turn should be too late. On such a day one can, if not appreciate, at least make allowance for, the feeling of some few Hunts which prefer that their sport should be only for their own members, and are jealous of the stranger or the new comer. 'Tis on such a day that one may, if one wishes, mark and learn something of the individuals of the pack; and so, for that matter,—whether they wish it or not—do men learn something of each other. Good qualities are more marked, peculiarities become patent, idiosyncrasies betray themselves, imposture is dispelled, and friendships are made. To sift and winnow the Quorn field for readers' benefit is not my desire, nor in my power. This I may say, that contact with it under such conditions is ever a soothing process, and one that clears away all ill-feeling towards one's fellow-men. The Quorn field has its dandies, its jesters, its purveyors of dinner and after-dinner stories, its thrusters, its men of caution, its ardent sportsmen and its slack, its dauntless pioneer to show

whether each bottom is to be jumped or what is its depth, its amateur helps (or hindrances, may be) to huntsman, its men of mind and its men of matter. But among all these, and many others, you will never hear a word that carries with it more than good fellowship, jest and geniality. To hunt and to enjoy themselves is the principle they advocate and on which they act.

Now to Monday—Wartnaby Stone Pits, a rainy morning, and every man fortified by three days' rest. Let us dismiss the morning, and trace the outline of that cheery afternoon.

At twenty minutes to four (by an indifferent watch) the first note sounded in Lord Aylesford's covert ; and the hands pointed to the quarter as we galloped round to Will's shrill scream on the Shoby Scoles side. The same scream rang out again clear and sharp when, a minute later, he had by a quick forward movement viewed his fox away beyond the second covert. There he goes—a black form stealing over the Shoby hill, apparently the same faint-hearted one who wasted our afternoon but one Monday ago. But, hurrah, there's another, gliding along the same hill side, but bending his course with the valley that stretches down to Hoby—a light-coloured and lighter-hearted customer is this. Firr is for the moment shut in by a locked gate ; while the dog pack are noisily following the track through the Scoles. “Take the right-hand line for Heaven's sake ! Both are past the gorse bushes yonder ; but the last fox has gone down the valley, the other only back to Lord Aylesford's.” And, ye gods, how they are holloaing back—keeping the hounds' heads up and almost turning Firr in his saddle, with their distracting shouts. But an old hound has flung himself wide and forward with ears closed to the distant tumult ; his deep voice recalls his bewildered comrades to their senses ; and now they are away, pointing confidently for the best country north of the Wreake—the best, in spite of the bottoms and nullahs that cross it here and there. The first of these watercourses is met after the three early fields. A small post-and-rails into water running over sound

gravel solves this difficulty. An early casualty has stopped one of the best (and always one of the foremost) of riders. His horse flew two fences at a corner in preference to one, landed into a third, a barricade of high timber, and was, I believe, completely entrapped. With hounds just settled to run hard, a shepherd dog has anticipated them; but the lost second puts those who meant to ride with the other fox once more on fair terms: and all start forward again together. There are nice fields and nice fences up to Hoby village and past the right of it. The range of alarming oxers we were wont to associate with the manor would seem to have disappeared; and there is nothing yet to hinder or frighten as the chase proceeds on its even way. Never *very* fast, but always going; and always fast enough if for a moment you get left behind. Another mile or so, and suddenly the field pauses where a deep thorn-covered chasm bisects a valley. Scrutiny does not better its forbidding aspect; so even "Ashby," Mr. J. Tomkinson's famous roarer, is reluctantly denied a trial, and with mortification on his owner's countenance taken right or left to ford or bridge. And it wasn't a very big place after all! But we don't like "chancing" these blind wide bottoms—at least when we've been swallowed a few times, or seen the back of more than one good horse broken in the attempt. The next valley has also its watercourse; but it is to be done either by pushing through the tangled bullfinch and doubling over with a second effort, or—much more pleasantly—by using the good bridge that offers itself not a hundred yards away. And so in *thirty minutes* hounds enter Cossington Gorse. With a burning scent they might have got there in twenty-five, or even a minute or two less. But they reached it now with men and horses steaming, and everyone speaking well of the fun they had seen. The rest of the story of the day may be summed up as follows: There were a brace of foxes in the covert; and the run one (draggled and dirty) soon broke again over the road. Over part of the same course they ran him back; then they had suddenly two lines in front of them. Pursuing on, they

bore to the left to Ragdale Hall, ran between that and the village, and finally (at ten minutes past five) whipped off when just about to re-enter Shoby Scoles—thus making the run to be *one hour and twenty-five minutes* in all.

The chief news of the week ending February 9, 1878, was the resignation of Mr. Tailby, after two and twenty years of honourable office. The narrowed limits of his present country and the entire want of woodlands in which to work his young hounds are the reasons which have brought about his determination. As a Master who has thrown half a lifetime, heartily and successfully, into the cause of foxhunting, his name will ever carry with it encomium and respect. He first offered himself at a crisis; and has ever since, in fair weather and in foul, carried on with energy and determination the task that he had undertaken.

Vague rumours also came afloat of Lord Spencer being about to resign the Mastership of the Pytchley. Every qualification of position and ability point to him as being the *only* man to fill a most difficult post; and if he retires the loss will be well-nigh irreparable. Rumour, with her many tongues, whispers her sinister prophecies also about the noble lord who rules with liberal hand over the best and wildest country in the Shires, Lord Lonsdale.

SUNNY FEBRUARY.

FRIDAY, February 8th, and Monday, February 11th, with the Quorn, were two as hot days as were ever credited to the month of February. The sun shone out all day with the force and brilliancy of June—all out of keeping with the end and object for which our small section of the community had met and assembled. But some excellent sport was shown on Friday when men expected none. Twelve was the hour named, in kindness to those who, in pump or satin shoe, had been, till

well-nigh daylight, treading the plank of dissipation at the Leicestershire Hunt Ball.

The afternoon grew cooler, and it was close upon four o'clock when Colonel Burnaby's Covert was appealed to. Readily it answered ; and readily did men rush round the deep ridge and furrow which border it, as the horn called them away at the lower end. For a second or two hounds hovered at the brook-side ; and the multitude availed themselves of it to dash into and up the road and anticipate the pack on the opposite bank. Indeed anticipation was the order of the day. Horses' heads were set at their fences wherever direction appeared defined or even probable. In many instances it happened that hounds had eventually to be brought back actually behind sinners whose consciences can scarcely have been so hardened but that the situation carried its own rebuke. The Master bore his trials with Job-like forbearance ; and Firr worked doggedly on, apparently unruffled by the difficulties that beset him. Leading and conduced more than all else to this mischief, there is a small and happily select corps in the hunting field, often mentioned and bibliothised by name, who, in their laudable passion for giving each other a lead, consider hounds are altogether apart from the question, and circle freely round them whenever they dwell long enough for the opportunity. The following is a fair and veritable instance of the doings of the class. X. was an even-tempered, long-suffering, but now exasperated official, who for an hour had worked his hounds through the overwhelming crowd in spite of all difficulties. A. was a prominent member of the above corps, but had just brought his evil career to a close in a blind ditch. B., however, was present in all his iniquity, and just preparing to set his horse at a fence, up to which one hound was feeling his way. X., a Wellington in such an emergency, at once pointed to the right, where a new double oxer lay wide and frowning, and remarked, "If Mr. A. were here, he'd soon have a cut at it." The words were no sooner out of his mouth than round went B. in full charge, measured his length into a field from which

he had no escape, while X. pursued his way, and his fox—free for a time from both of his enemies. The scent was exactly of that class that hounds wanted room. Room given they could have gone very fast. Hampered as they were, they could yet afford what is best defined as a “quick hunting run.” And when hounds run at all over such a country there must needs be fun and merriment for many and most of us. By Barsby, Ashby, and Lowesby, there is nothing but grass, with fences fair and frequent, honest and enticing. When jumping ceases to be a pleasure, then Leicestershire has ceased to be the place for us; and the Downs of the Tedworth or the Brighton Harriers will be our refuge. The thrill of a flying leap is only a part of the joy of a good grass country. But it is a very large and leading part; while our nerve lasts and we are happy in our horseflesh. For like all else in life, it has its provisos and conditions. Circumstance and accident have their full influence upon it; and the same gauge will not always register a like degree. *Rare* fun it is to jump and ride, with a good horse under you, a light heart within you—with the flush of boisterous health in your cheeks, and head and eye as clear as Amontillado. Reverse the conditions; word and frame them to embrace a horse that has no confidence in you nor you in him; call up the demons of late hours, strong tobacco, or whatever may have been the agents of deteriorated nerve or inferior health. Forthwith, a jump becomes a necessity, a fence is no longer a recreation, but a run with hounds is like a midnight walk through a churchyard. Even if the condition of comparison rests only with the steed, its differences are forcible and palpable enough. You take care not to own to it yourself; but you are quick enough to notice if your friends don’t ride their studs all through, in the accepted sense of the term. Two fields and a casual glance will—except, of course, in many brave instances—serve to show you whether theirs is a ride of recreation or of necessity. In the former case you probably envy them (your own fate being at the moment saddled to the worst beast in your stable). In the latter you can

but admire the courage that refuses to yield to any such trial.

But this is not history. Friday's was a run of which everyone seemed bent on making the most—and by reason of its jumps more than all else. They glanced and darted, and buzzed round the pack as it bored its way rapidly for half an hour. When it finally worked back to Baggrave, all were unanimous in praise of these thirty minutes, which all had, in one fashion or another, been able to see throughout.

Their fox was almost in view as they re-entered Baggrave Spinney; but he was quicker through than they were. They hunted him on beyond for more than another half hour, when darkness prevented their following him into Barkby Holt.

On Monday last (Feb. 11th) they (the Quorn) were at Six Hills; and the substance of the day lay in a sharp and hot sixteen or seventeen minutes from Walton Thorns to Cossington Gorse, over a blind but by no means unsporting country. The hunt continued afterwards for a mile or two, to Sileby—near which village a gully perforated with rabbit holes ended the pursuit. Whether the blinding sun or the blindness of the ditches had most to do with the extraordinary number of falls during the day, ask some of the dozen gallant ladies and gentlemen who at the same moment were running about on foot in the parish of Ratcliffe-on-the-Wreake. You will scarcely credit me, perhaps; but from recent observation I am decidedly of opinion that the fair sex in butcher-boots is more nimble, and certainly more graceful, in footing it across a deep fallow than fellow sportsmen in tops. The only really disastrous fall I heard of was that which came to the lot of Lord James Douglas—his horse putting his foot into a newly made drain when galloping across an open field. It is said that he fell, unobserved by anyone and shaken senseless, when the sun was shining brightly, and woke to find a labourer standing over him by the light of the moon. Though chilled and bruised, he



has been, I am glad to add, progressing rapidly towards recovery.

On Wednesday, Feb. 13th, the Belvoir met at Piper Hole, and we may turn to Melton Spinney in the afternoon. One fox away, a second gone, a third in covert—natural confusion and an ill-attended start. This epitome conveys in some degree the aspect of affairs and the position of the field when at last hounds burst away towards Thorpe Arnold. A scent now, certainly ; and grass and a still cold afternoon to assist it. The pack dash off towards Melton, glance down a hedge-row to the left, and in two fields are on the Thorpe Arnold Brook—a stream of no size, but of proved capacity as regards immersive and obstructive power. It offers no tempting opportunity now. Its width is small ; but its banks are wide-set and sloping ; so a jump must be a compromise between a creep and a fly. “ Honour to whom honour is due.” Capt. Longstaff undertakes the office of pioneer ; and Mr. Farley’s priceless grey* lands under him like three hundred guineas. Miss Turnor’s brown follows like six hundred and forty ; and then there ensues a scene of scrambling and falling and shirking such as could only be enjoyed by one whose discretion could allow him to wait and watch. One veteran was raving up and down the bank, declaiming, exclaiming, and proclaiming the right spot, and finally getting in with his horse on the top of him. A second ditto had the “best waterjumper in England,” only number one “fell just in front of him.” One chestnut horse was struggling out, as a second dropped with broken back beside him—and the latter belonged, I believe, to a hard good rider who has been already visited with a previous like misfortune this season. Meanwhile, hounds were sweeping over the brow ; with the grey and the lady nearest in pursuit ; and so they reached Brentingby Spinney, and pressed on to Freeby Wood—fourteen capital minutes to here. On at once by Waltham Pasture for some more merry minutes ; past the back of Waltham Village (into whose yawning stonewall one of our best

* The grey had just been purchased by Mr. T. Farley for 640 guineas.

and oldest leaders, whose nerve still remains stronger than his eyesight, was as near as possible plunging); and so to Croxton Park. Here their fox was so dead beat by the pace of the past *forty minutes* that a man on foot was running after him to catch him. But he slipped through a hole in the park wall; and when hounds came up close behind, they missed him, overshot the line, and failed to recover it.

WITHOUT HOUNDS AND WITH.

SATURDAY, February 23rd, with the Cottesmore, and again a steady undeniable scent. They did not find at Ranksboro—probably for the untoward reason that a few days previously they had chopped no less than *three* foxes together, in a small clump of gorse adjacent.

There was sport in the afternoon for some few—though, as too often happens at the large woods, it was lost by the bulk of a field that is neither slack nor careless. As hounds crashed through the whole length of Owston Wood (from the “Little Wood”) all hands either dashed down its sides or scrambled through its miry depths, in desperate determination to keep on terms. As the western extremity was reached, many issued mudstained and heated, at the same moment as a hundred others galloped breathlessly round to the same point. But the clamorous music of the pack, that a moment before was to be heard raging alongside, no longer reached the ear. How could it be so suddenly hushed? “Where are the hounds?” “Was anyone here when they reached the end?” No one had seen them. But somebody had viewed a fox crossing a far hillside towards John o’ Gaunt. This was explanation enough. “They must have stolen away before we got here.” A sportsman in black* forthwith set off at a gallop over Whadborough Hill. The example was contagious, and fifty men at once started to ride after him. Glancing behind he saw, as he

* Honourable J. D.

thought, his judgment confirmed, made the most of his lucky start, and galloped the harder. There were jealous ones after him ; and over fence after fence they steeplechased to get up, while a stray hound or two chimed in to assist the illusion. At length the leader found himself at fault ; the information which had given him the supposed line of the fox was expended ; and he was compelled to pull up and look round for further indication. Then and then only did it dawn upon the body of pursuers, as they closed round him, that they had perhaps been pursuing a chimera ; and that their five minutes' burst had grown out of no sounder foundation than their own imaginative fears. That they did not think any the better of themselves in consequence was easily to be gathered from their blank faces and uneasy laughter—as, after scanning first the horizon and then each other, they slunk back with shame to Owston Wood. There they found the pack still chasing an unwilling foe round the great covert ; and it was open to them either to plunge again into its deep dark rides or to take their chance outside. Most of them preferred the latter alternative ; and thus, when twenty minutes later Neal issued on the Withcote side, after a fox some minutes ahead, scarcely anyone was left with him save Messrs. H. Lowther, Logan, Tomkinson, Leatham, and Pryor. He blew his horn lustily ; so more came up shortly, and others joined in on the way—for a pleasant hunting run. His fox had plenty of time in hand to dawdle ; so had evidently sauntered on no direct nor hurried path round the valley to the left of Launde Wood. But still hounds hunted it out easily, and quickened their pace, as they turned back by Pryor's Coppice (leaving it a field to the right), and the plot thickened by the arrival of another contingent of pursuers. By the little meadows round Braunston, then to the right and on to the ploughs beyond Brook, there was fast and pretty hunting. At length they bore leftwards again ; plough succeeded plough ; yet hounds were not at fault, but pushed onwards unceasingly, till they touched the grass again within three fields of Orton Park Wood. Then they came to a sudden

stop. Their heads went up helplessly ; and no effort of Neal's sufficed to recover the lost thread. Coming quick over plough, and halting in a moment where, at a cross hedgerow, they again reached good scenting turf—it seemed odds on their fox having got to ground. But I learn since that the key to the enigma is contained in the fact that he lay down in the plough, dead beat, after his *fifty minutes'* travelling. The list of those who had thus been fortunate enough to get some work out of their afternoon horses is so limited that I think I can give it almost in its entirety. In addition to those mentioned above there were Lord Manners, Captain Jacobson, Colonel E. Chaplin, Lord Helmsley, Messrs. Finch, W. Richards, C. Chaplin and Clayton.

I must now be allowed a word or two on a point, which may bring me upon somewhat delicate ground. In the confident hope that my remarks will not be taken amiss, I will venture the subject. It will, I think, be admitted by everyone that the number of ladies who hunt now is at least ten-fold as compared with a dozen years ago—and the statement may fairly be endorsed with the words *tant mieux*. I am one of those who, far from cavilling selfishly at their presence, admit heartily the advantages, direct and indirect, of their participating in a pursuit, in which we men are too often charged with allowing ourselves to be entirely absorbed. But when ladies cast in their lot with the rougher sex, lay themselves out to share in all the dangers and discomforts incidental to the chase, and even compete for honours in the school of foxhunting—they should in common fairness be prepared to accept their position on even terms, nor neglect to render in some degree mutual the assistance so freely at their command, and that men in a Leicestershire field so punctilioously afford to each other. The point on which they prominently fail in this particular is, to speak plainly, their habitual neglect—or incapacity—at *gateways*. Given the rush and crush of three hundred people starting for a run and pressing eagerly through a single way of exit—to wit, an ordinary gate, swinging easily and lightly,

and requiring only that each passer through should by a touch hinder its closing after him or her. Of these three hundred in all probability thirty are ladies ; and I commit myself to the statement that not more than five of that number will do their share towards preserving the passage for those who follow them. The bulk of them will vaguely wave what they, forsooth, term their hunting-whips towards the returning gate ; while others merely give their mounts a kick in the ribs and gallop onwards, with no look behind at the mischief and mortification they have caused. The gate slams, the crowd press on to it, a precious minute or two is lost, and scores of people are robbed of their chance in the forthcoming gallop. And yet these are our sisters whose arms and nerves are strong enough to steer an impetuous horse over the most difficult country and who turn away from nothing that we can dare to face. The intense annoyance entailed by a gate being dropped into its intricate fastenings through want of ability or of consideration on the part of the fair Amazon immediately preceding him, has brought into the mouth of many a chivalrous sportsman a muttered anathema on the feminine taste for hunting that scarce any other provocation would have availed to rouse. It is only quite of late that a certain number of our hunting ladies have provided themselves with whips at all capable of supporting a gate ; and not many of these can use them even now. I make bold to say not only that every lady who hunts should be armed with a sufficient hunting-crop (with, of course, a lash to guard against its loss in a gateway), but that no lady ought to deem herself qualified to take her place in the field till she has learned how to use it. Were such a rule adhered to, we should hear none of the sweeping remarks indulged in by sufferers who have over and over again writhed under disappointments, that, if inflicted by their own sex, would have quickly called forth direct charges of inconsiderateness and want of courtesy. To unlatch a gate, or even to contend against a high wind and a heavy weight of timber, are never expected of a lady ; but anything but feelings

of sympathy are excited, when at a critical moment she declines the slight effort that is due and on which your whole sport may hinge, gallops through the closing gate, and goes off heedless of the vexation she has caused or of the obligation she has neglected.

If I have put the case in such a light as may set some of our well-loved sportswomen thinking—not indignantly—I shall feel that my pen has not touched the subject in vain.

THRUST AND THIRST.

I HAVE to tell of a find at Thorpe Trussells, a furious glorious twenty minutes to the Punchbowl, the run fox killed in an hour, and a fresh one taking the body of the pack on (un-aware of its own success) for thirty minutes more ; of how only six horses of steeplechase class could live the pace of the early gallop, and how, as they rose Dalby Hill, six men were a quarter of a mile to the good of their squandered field. These were Lord Castlereagh on a horse that had once scored honours in the Downshire Plate ; Sir Charles Wolsey on the winner of the Quenby point-to-point chase of the previous Wednesday ; Captain Smith on Blackberry ; Lord Helmsley, whose mount had won more than once between the flags ; Captain Jacobson and Mr. Owen, both on thoroughbreds of tried capacity. The only person who reached them on the way was Firr, whose faculty for making up any deficiency of start has long been marvellous. At the Punchbowl their fox was as blown as their horses ; but, recovering his wind, he gave them yet another climb over Burrough Hill, treated them to the Melton Steeplechase Course before he died, and succumbed in Adams' Gorse. Hounds went right through the single-acre covert with a fresh object in view, and ran him hard and brilliantly, a circle that nearly touched Twyford and Burrough. Two or three couple had finished off their hunted

fox in covert. The remainder were whipped off—as soon as tired horses could effect it—when about to enter the Punch-bowl once more. These things—and others—took place on Friday afternoon, February 22nd. One little incident of the run I remember to have entered in mental notes, to wit a success at high timber—to which pluck and shoulders assisted Lord Rossmore, even at the end of an hour's severe going. *What are good shoulders*, readers? Are they sloping? Are they strong? Yes, they may be, should be, but not necessarily must be. Let them only tell you as you sit for one minute above them, "We sha'n't roll upon you," and you may put safely aside orthodoxy of shape and symmetry. A second definition expresses the same sense in different words, "A horse with good shoulders is one whose centre of gravity is at all times in front of you." I say it not to such as may rightly deem themselves my grandmothers of the chase; but to the tyro—if any can be found to own himself such—I recommend that he should ride no horse over Leicestershire who will not answer the above requirements—or, if he does, that he should at least refrain from riding him, especially when more or less blown, at sound oak rails out of deep ground.

Friday, the 1st instant, brought March in "like a lamb;" and our last month of hunting was ushered forth in its most melting mood. Rain fell again the greater part of the day. There was a scent, evidently; but foxes and fate were not altogether propitious. The meet was Baggrave Hall, where the weary are ever welcomed, and even the thirst begotten of a Masonic Ball can be assuaged. Let me not be deemed disrespectful towards the most Christian Order, in inquiring how it is that entertainments under their auspices ever carry with them such apparent torment of consequent drought. We have seen a gamekeeper habitually finish the beer jug after luncheon "lest he should be thirsty another time." This wholesome precautionary measure is, I take it, seldom neglected by the Knights of St. John; and yet, after their gathering at Melton Mowbray, they doffed their aprons—like black-

smiths from before their furnaces or cooks from their fiery ovens—and galloped, with blanched faces and parched lips, for the hospitable Colonel's sideboard. This done, they all got the wrong side of the wire fencing in the park ; and not one of them was near hounds while the latter raced a fox to ground some five or six minutes away. An M.F.H.* came across the pack, as he pounded along on a galloping hack. The mare had been bustled ten miles from home, and already was covered with lather and foam. But she left the road with an easy bound, as he turned her aside to the leading hound. An oxrail covered the following fence, when he found he'd a hunter in every sense. And so it's arranged with excellent reason, for a certain Hunt in the coming season—If the Master be late at the covert side, the hounds never wait till he finish his ride ; but the huntsman at once shall open the ball, and drive the fox out towards Harkaway Hall.

I did not intend to rhyme, and I mean no offence. This said, we may follow on over the Leicester and Lowesby road, where the brief game has ended at a drain. Firr was soon sounding a requiem over bold Reynard, as he lay probably laughing in his brush ; and soon all the field had made their way through a single hole in the high thorn bullfinch, and were assembled in the meadow—explaining to each other by what unheard-of combination of circumstance and mischance each had for this once failed to be with hounds. While this was going on, a butcher and his two companions (of striking similarity of bulk and appearance), wishing to get a nearer view of the animated picture, turned their cart out of the road, and drove down the adjacent field. Dobbin may, or may not, have followed the Quorn in some other capacity in early life. Let this be as it may—no sooner did he see other steeds jumping through the gap in the fence, than, cocking his ears and entirely forgetful of his present circumstances, he took the bit in his teeth and dashed at the hedge. The Jehu of the party in vain threw his weight into the reins. His comrades gave

* Sir Bache Cunard.

themselves up to livid despair ; and the howl that rose from the trio as they found themselves rapidly nearing their doom thrilled through the assembled multitude beyond. Dobbin jumped with a strength and vigour that would have carried him over a double-oxer—his force intensified by the downhill approach. But the opening that was wide enough for *him* did not nearly admit of the cart. With a crash that might have been heard at Leicester, both wheels struck the stout black-thorn. Dobbin rushed madly on with the shafts clattering at his heels, while the hapless butchers rolled harmlessly down the hill. Their affrighted steed galloped, kicking furiously, through the whole crowd (and close to the hounds)—but fortunately without coming into collision with anyone. A scene so absurd would have been much more in keeping with Epping Forest, or as the subject of an old sporting print, than with the reality of a Quorn Friday—but I give it as it occurred.



TO GROUND IN VIEW.

A FEW light showers on March 11th prepared the ground for a good Tuesday with the Cottesmore. There can be no prettier meet than Launde Abbey—a picturesque building, nestling under its old elms, and surrounded by the woods of the centre of High Leicestershire. And not only does it hold out a scene, fascinating in itself, and doubly attractive (in some senses, at least) on a morning of gayest sunlight such as Tuesday; but the rendezvous has a further advantage. It is only to be reached, come whence you may, by riding through a wild grass country, the glory of the Cottesmore—every yard of which must help to kindle the fire of memory or imagination in the mind of the hurrying sportsman. Canter to covert, for instance, by way of Twyford and Owston, and I wager that (as has been said in other words by better men before me) it will take the edge off your appetite for any country where the sickle holds the place of the shepherd's crook—where the enthusiasm of the chase is sluggish, and its poetry inert.

Launde Park Wood has many acres, and its rides are deep; so 'tis no easy matter to insure that hounds shall not leave it without the advantage of your company. On this bright, clear morning the holloas on the side of the Abbey cut shrilly through the air and pierced the wood—just when you, perhaps, fearful of the undrained depths within (though, by the way, the Park Wood in this respect suffers nothing by comparison with the ordinary run of big woodlands) had again betaken yourself outside the covert. Make up your mind quickly to get round or get through. A mile, you know, will scarcely carry you round either half circle. The cheer of the huntsman and the quick-repeating twang of the horn already tell of departure; and a chilly sensation, almost of despair, creeps within your hunting-vest. Through the wood is your only chance—though hard men are galloping to the right and veterans careering to the left. Down the ride as fast as you can struggle and blob and splash! Hocks and sinews be—forgotten! If you're late you'll

be a miserable man—as miserable, almost, as if the mare dies to-night! So drive her through; and make the best of it that, as you issue from the covert, you can see hounds—like a flock of pigeons in the distance—skimming up the opposite pasture, their bright colours sparkling in the sun. They are heading for Owston Wood. The wood is a mile away, and they have already cleared a quarter of the distance. The great gully behind Withcote Hall is dividing and hindering the earliest mass of pursuers. ““Tis no use to follow that choking string,” you reason in this moment of nervous uncertainty. Hounds are swinging leftwards, and you keep leftwards of the ravine; for if they turn from Owston Wood you will cut them off, while if they enter it they may hang long enough to let you up. The turn favours you, and without hurrying you may be with them, as with a wide sweep they come round to touch Launde Wood, and dash on beyond at once. After Launde Wood comes the spirit and fun of the gallop; and for the next five-and-twenty minutes you ought to be happy—if a racing pack, a grand line, a decent horse, and a screaming scent can make you so. Is that a crow flitting up the meadow half a mile away? Hold your tongue, and hounds will soon tell you as they are running now. Your horse and you must both be quick if you get to the spot nearly as soon as they—and every chirping voice proclaims that indeed it was Reynard and no rook. Loddington is just passed, and left on your right, and a great country it is beyond. The farmers have made their fences stiff, but yet such as the fervour of a quick burst avails to render feasible; while the conservatism of old ridge-and-furrow turf is a sacred principle here. For a mile or two of this it is a race between hounds and horses—the former scoring a point or two, till their game, pressed to exhaustion, is forced to a sharp curve to the right (just short of Belton), and the turn rather favours horses. Half a dozen more big pastures and then the Belton brook. *Yonder he goes!* Not three hundred yards before the hounds, and his now ragged form all curled and drooping! In two minutes they must

surely have him. Over the brook they dash—blood in every note. But at the very spot where we saw him struggling on, their heads are up. The Belton brook is ill to jump and difficult to ford, hereabouts. Sir Beaumont Dixie finds a place to lead his horse up the bank, but it takes Neal a minute or two to attain the other side. The *who-whoop* sounds—not over Reynard's mangled carcase, but over the sanctuary he has found—the same drain that gave him rest a month ago, close to the new Belton viaduct. Something between fifty minutes and an hour was the run—the last twenty-five being of highest grade. Of those who rode the gallop three were ladies—viz., Lady Florence Dixie, Mrs. Candy, and Mrs. Adair—the last-named being quite one of the nearest to hounds at the finish. The men were, perhaps, thirty in number, prominent among them being all the Goslings who hunt in this county, cheered on, as was meet, by the Colonel at their head. Sir Beaumont Dixie was right well carried by Musketeer; and I believe I am right in saying that Lord Manners, Mr. Leatham, Lord Castlereagh, Captains Barclay and Ashton, and Mr. Adair were among the number close to hounds throughout.

END OF THE SEASON.

THE byday on Monday (April 8th) was a last effort of the Quorn; and, appointing one o'clock as the hour, they first brought attention to bear upon Mr. Barclay's well-spread luncheon table, at Scrafford Hall. Half a hurricane was blowing all day, and through this hounds drew in vain through the Ceplow and John o' Gaunt. The former of these coverts has been the staunchest of allies all the season; but even this could not hold out for ever, under the repeated demands made upon it. John o' Gaunt is the central point of a junction of two new railway lines, and forms the Sunday resort of a goodly body of navvies, whose intrenchments already make the passage

to the covert a horrible ordeal. With a deep cutting reaching to the very edge of the narrow path, the latter have a ditch dug across it, which the field, with fear and trembling, were now forced to jump in single file.

It remained for Colonel Burnaby's Covert at Baggrave to supply the last little episode of the Quorn season. Hounds were soon at work in earnest, plunging through the short gorse and dashing round its outskirts. Their fox doubled through their midst, to escape with a view holloa beyond—a holloa that to-day had twice the acting power of any previous date. The deepest ridge and furrow encircles the covert ; but horses were spurred in and out of it with all the *animus* of a last chance—all the vigour of a forlorn hope. Firr had got through the covert and was doing all he knew to throw hounds quickly on the line. A shepherd, with his arms round a family ewe and his heart in the hunt, pointed the exact smeuse at the second fence. Wisdom and Fairmaid corroborated his evidence ; and away they sped for South Croxton. A gate offered ; and a loose cart colt promptly blocked it. The Rector (there is only one in each Hunt) crashed over the double-hedge beside it ; and disdained, too, a latchway exit at the fence beyond. The brook came next—deep-banked and awkward—best negotiated at a trot. Hardened and baked by the East wind, the turf resounded like a drum. But there are months before us to cure joints and sinews ; so this is no time to think of *them*—with the Quorn bitches speeding ahead up the hill. Into a lane ; out of it where a gateway had been feebly built up with rails and thorns ; over three or four well-laid stake-and-bounds ; and yet you were scarcely with the pack. Firr carried them on to a leading couple as he flew three good draw-rails to his cry of “ Ware—Horse ! *Have a care ! !* ” For ten minutes hounds raced ; for a quarter of an hour they hunted. But the scent was fleeting ; and after discounting the parishes of South Croxton and Barsby, they were more and more at a loss—till at length the parched ground refused them further favour, and the season of the Quorn for '77-'78 was at an end.

Three o'clock on a hot spring afternoon was the hour, and the circumstances, of the last meet of the season '77-'78—the Belvoir maintaining the final act. No crowd of brilliant company gathered under the walls of the Ducal Castle ; for Melton had relapsed once more into a tiny market-town. With two or three exceptions, every lodge in the bright little metropolis was already empty—save of valets left behind to pack. From these exceptions there sallied forth, in cubhunting garb, the few who were bent on, and could afford the time for, seeing the very end of foxhunting for the season that is now filed and docketed with the past. They went out with no serious thought of hunting in its practical sense. But they were on the spot; and why should not their eyes be gladdened with one more sight and sound of hounds ? Their canter to Belvoir Castle was alone worth a dozen mornings of saddle lounge in the Row. For them there was mile after mile of roadside turf and of scenery sporting and familiar. Over Croxton Park, where the *débris* of the Race meeting still remained. Along the unenclosed carriage road to the Belvoir Woods, where bevies of rabbits were sunning themselves at every bank and hedgerow—their white scuts glancing as brightly before the invader as flying fish before a dolphin. Three o'clock, as I said before, was the hour named ; but the Duke usually gives a liberal margin. So no need to hurry under the sunshine, or to spoil the after-luncheon regalia and its sweet day-dreams—of gallops that are past and gallops that we may yet live to see. You are, as usual, half an hour later than your fellows—in the idleness of your habit and the perversity of your nature—but fear of missing a first run has no power now to drive you forward, in frantic haste and torturing self-reproach. Your shooting-hat is thrust back off the forehead, that you may bask freely in the coaxing rays ; your reins lie across the pommel, while you flick the daisies with listless thong ; the regalia draws freely, and the hack never kicks a pebble. You are enjoying to the full that state of happy abstraction most fully conveyed in the unclassic expression, “*a good moon.*”

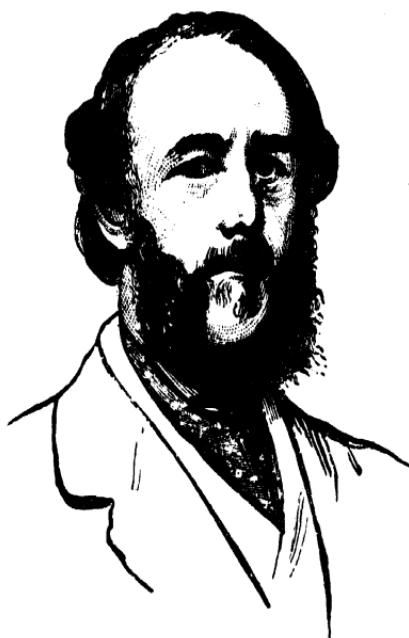
You are on terms of declared enmity with no one, from your banker to your bootmaker; and for the moment anger lies dormant even against the beast who kills foxes. Yet there is sadness in the situation, and a weight for which you cannot account presses on your uncovered brow. The scene does not invigorate, but rather wearies. You are oppressed with a sensation of not belonging to the occasion—of an inappropriateness of presence almost such as when in a nightmare one imagines oneself walking abroad in sleeping attire, or as fell upon a friend of mine who, being engaged to dine at one house, made a mistake in its number, and suddenly became conscious that for five minutes he had been making himself agreeable in the drawing room next door—preparing to honour perfect strangers with his company at dinner.

The sight of the hounds—with Gillard and his assistants all that is orthodox in pink and cap—rouses you up and makes you feel more at home; and if you cannot find ten or fifteen minutes' pleasant employment in looking over the "big pack," your long journey has scarcely been worth undertaking. Fashion and class are prominent in every hound as they stand on the paved stableyard below the Castle—bright and glossy in their wondrously matched colouring. Conspicuous even in this company is a grand hound, Rockwood (if I remember right) by name. Being half brother to Quorn Watchman (who originally came from Belvoir, and who has earned both prizes in the show yard and credit in the kennel), he is, I presume, a son of the famous Belvoir Rallywood. The latter, by the way, spent much of his old age in idle freedom in the Castle grounds, and at one time amused himself with a great deal of independent hunting in the Belvoir Woods. He would scour them for days together; and is known to have thus killed at least three foxes single-handed. One of these was a bobtailed veteran who had beaten the pack for two seasons; but Rallywood was seen to bring him to bay, then after slaying his foe he trotted quietly off, with stern and bristles up, while the countrymen brought the still warm body to the kennels. I am told that, not long

since, his Grace declined an offer of two thousand guineas for the pick of a single couple from his pack; and Rockwood was to be one of this couple.

The woods on the northern side of the Castle were first drawn. The turf in the home-park was soft and mossy; but the rides inside the woods were baked and hardened by the east wind; and the ground amid the undergrowth was dusty and dry. Here and there, in a spot open to the sun but sheltered from the wind, spring had asserted itself in well-established verdure; but in most places the woodlands were still in winter garb. A fox found himself, and nearly ran against the venerable Chambers (who for forty years or more has ridden the huntsmen's second horse, till every gap and gate has long been written on his memory). But hounds could only just note their assent to his loud proclaiming signal; and were quite unable to follow the clue with any vigour. Into the gardens under the Castle windows they worked out the track as they best could. After this there was now and again a sudden wave of a stern or an excited snuffing among the dead leaves. But the suspicion of their fox's track never rose again to the certainty that could prompt the fling of a tongue, and the pursuit died out—if ever it actually lived. Meantime the little field had found excuse for galloping a mile or two across the park; then trotted and walked along garden paths, past flower beds, grottos and "lovers' walks," till now they climbed about a succession of wooded heights that led westwards in the direction of Braunston village. At the further extremity of these, hounds at length pushed a fox out, ran him fast over half a dozen light ploughs with easy subdividing fences, then turned after him to re-enter the big woods once more. Six p.m. and fourteen miles from home! No; it couldn't be done. So taking off our hat to the Castle of Belvoir, in gratitude to the Duke who gives us our sport with so liberal a hand, we pulled up till the last sound of horn and hound had faded into the forest depths; then turned homewards to wait another season.

Our runs and our gallops are over for a time. That a burst with hounds is a thing worth living for remains to us as a *fact* proved and positive—but a fact that for a while must be held in abeyance and cherished only in memory. The cry of sixteen couple—the dash of a twenty-minutes scurry—the

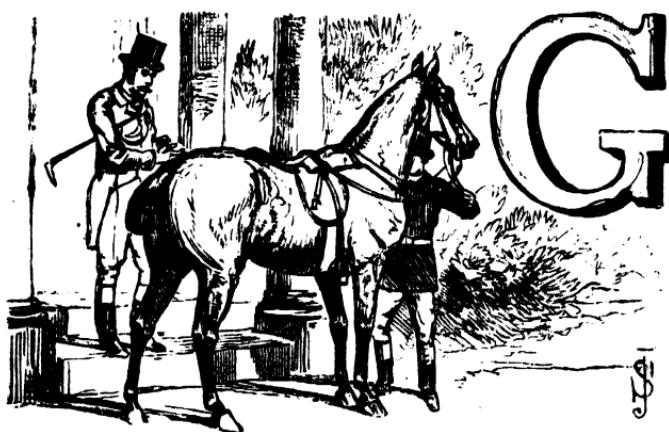


DUKE OF RUTLAND.

exuberant and excited companionship of the chase, must stand over till another autumn. The dawdle of the Park, the pleasures of Ascot, the whirr of the grouse will take its place ; but hope will often glance forward to Cream Gorse and Ranksboro', while thought will frequently recur to the crippled favourite at home, whose last overtaxed effort has doomed him to blister and the iron.

SEASON 1878-79.

BOOT AND SADDLE.



E T into
y o u r
saddles,
men of
Melton,
as soon
as you
c a n !
T h e
Quorn
have al-
r e a d y

galloped from the Coplow to the Cottesmore Woods; seven foxes were found in Melton Spinney on Monday; and there are two good litters at Ranksboro'. The blackthorn is really getting black; the ditches—well *they* are black, and blind too; and the turf is so velvety that the oldest pair of forelegs may be ridden with as much—perhaps more—impunity than the youngest. The last glimmers of sunshine and summer have been flickering about us; but now all is autumn proper, golden and cheerful—let others who do not hunt call it “drear” or what they like. To us there is a joy in the falling leaf, a halo round the dusky clouds, a glad sound in the patterning rain, and a pleasant whisper in the night wind. They tell of a happy prospect: and we hug ourselves over the future—forgetful, as any other section of the world might be, that what brings delight to us may mean discomfort and gloom to many differently situated.

For the leading subject of the letter just emerging from the ink-bottle—under date Thursday, October 24th—I must ask leave to take you back to the previous Friday (18th)—the Quorn at Lowesby Hall. To all appearance there was scarcely a meet at all ; but as the morning crept on the company grew, till by-and-by there must have been near upon two score of hunting folk, at least a score more in attendance upon them, and quite another score of horsemen representing absent masters. Among the first-named section were—the Master and Miss M. Webster, Captain and Mrs. Candy, Captain and Mrs. C. Chaplin, Captain and Miss Campbell, Sir Fred. Fowke, Colonel Chippindall, Captains O'Neal, Barclay, and Goodchild, Messrs. Pennington, Barclay, Hill-Trevor, Flower, Harter, Fowke, &c.

The navvies have been very busy all summer close to John o' Gaunt ; and Reynard could surely not expect to be left always idle in the immediate neighbourhood of so much industry. Still it is to be hoped that during the winter these gentry may think well to obtain their needful recreation from the Chase of the Fox, with all the accompaniments considered orthodox under the system of Meynell, and with that end will hold the little covert sacred for this special pursuit. John o' Gaunt has not long to live, unless (more unlikely than the lion and the lamb reclining side by side) it can continue to exist with a railway junction at its very elbow. No ; Move on ! Move on ! Our coverts are being pushed out, our green pastures are narrowed by the March of Progress. Well, we can shift the former, make the best of what remains of the latter—and, please God, the good sport will last *our* time.

The long-drawn note, as hounds were called out, told its own story. But its story wasn't quite true for all that—if one was to believe holloa and asseveration in the road. Someone had seen a fox. Someone else had seen two. And, though neither could the witnesses be identified nor their statements positively verified, an old hound after a while vouchsafed single note of endorsement—and there the rumour ended.

So they went on to Billesdon Coplow, with a vain appeal, on the way, to Lord Moreton's little gorse at Cold Newton ; and at the Coplow, or rather in its twin covert, Botany Bay, they hit upon a whole bevy of what the wild-stag huntsman impiously called "the little red beasts." The first holloa away, over the historic mound, was only met with a remark that "the old fox would do for another day ;" and hounds were busily at work, now in one part, now in another, of the good thorn thickets. A second holloa told that the fox they were running had gone ; and this time they were encouraged forward in earnest. No juvenile fugitive was this, either. He knew where other shelter was to be found, and he had travelled the road before. Surmounting the Coplow, he dipped over towards Billesdon and crossed into "Tomlin's Spinney"—the little plantation opposite. There had been but the weakest scent in covert ; and hounds could never push their fox. Now their heads were into an east wind ; they were right at his brush, and on the best of grass. Many Quornites will remember how, one day last winter, from this very point hounds slipped suddenly away from every one—two or three of the very quickest men alone excepted—and lost their field for the morning ? This Tomlin's Spinney lies under the crest of a rough hill, cut off from direct approach by a thick and high-grown fence that has no practicable breach. To reach the nearest opening entails a circuit of quite two hundred yards—and we have all experienced, to our grief and to our joy, what difference a couple of hundred yards will make, when hounds are going their best over an enclosed country. To hurry to the gate, to twist back over the side fence, did not take long. But the pack were already well over the brow ; and it was only the flash of the last white body that told where they had pierced the farther fence of the next field. To ride, or to lose hounds, was all the choice presented. The fences came quick and often—the thorns cut fair, but the ditches a trap. But, such is the virtue of excitement, example, and of no-time-to-think, that not even a four year old was caught—and a *three* year old

performed over the line without a fall. And yet we are accustomed to think the route from the Coplow to Tilton Wood no child's play in February.

Running, not exactly straight—or men would not have been as near them as they were—but at a capital pace, hounds drove their fox over a most pleasant country till, after twenty to twenty-five minutes, they threw up suddenly between the village and the wood of Tilton. He had been headed at the road, and doubled back alongside the bridgeroad by which we ride to the lower end of Tilton Wood. They solved this problem; but with a failing scent decided against following him into the woodlands. A warm delightful scurry it had been—a nem. con. verdict testified in fifty hot and well-pleased countenances.

I find it noted for the coming season that the Earl and Countess of Wilton will take up their residence at Egerton Lodge; Lord and Lady Grey de Wilton at the Limes; and Colonel and Mrs. Markham at "The House." Mr. and Mrs. Younger reside at Craven Lodge; and Mr. and Mrs. Chaplin at Wyndham Lodge. Lord and Lady Castlereagh will be at Sysonby Lodge (known equally as Plymouth Lodge); Lord Aylesford and Mr. Finch at the Manor House; Lord Hastings at Coventry House; Captain and Mrs. Stirling at Acacia Lodge; Mr. Baird and Captain Middleton at North Lodge; Mr. Julius Behrens at Newport Lodge; Messrs. H. and L. Flower at Park House; Mr. Parker at Highfield House; Mr. Pryor at The Birdcage. Mr. Little Gilmour is expected at the Harborough Hotel: Colonel Forester too, we hope, is sure to be down. Messrs. Creyke and Lubbock, and Colonel Stacpoole are to be at The George. The Old Club is not at present taken. Mr. and Mrs. Adair will this year be at the Mr. Fast's new house; and Major Paynter and Captain Boyce are, we trust, as certain as ever to appear. Lord Lonsdale had arranged to take the whole of "the Harborough" for the season; but has now decided to go abroad. Nor is Lord Wicklow expected this year. Mr. Gordon Bennett, with Captain and Mrs.

Candy, has taken Somerby Hall ; Lord Helmsley—Ashwell ; Mr. Harter—Asfordby Hall ; and Capt. Stephen—Leesthorpe.

Tuesday (November 5th) was Tilton Wood—whereat Lord Carington first took in hand the serious ribbons of mastership in the field. If the unanimous goodwill of his supporters and followers will aid him no little, his own determination to further sport will do still more. Every forethought has been given to men and hounds and country of late years ; but the presence of a directing Master in the field cannot but be of advantage. In the Cottesmore country hounds can nearly always run—if they have but a fair chance at starting, and room at a difficulty. The leading men are not the great sinners at overriding (when they ride *to* hounds) ; but it is the crush coming up from behind, whose turn is served by a check and who ride for those in front, that do the chief damage, and overwhelm the pack. But it is not for an individual to preach—though he takes advantage and license of a *nom-de-plume*. Egerton-Warburton tells us, truly enough, “we are all of us tailors in turn” ; scriptural authority has it that none of us are sinless ; while the writer of the best illustrative hunting poem that ever stirred Young England’s blood, is said not only to have killed the “best hound in my pack, sir,” but, driven desperate by the misdeed and the reproach, to have retorted, “Very sorry indeed, *but he must take his chance with the rest.*”

On Tuesday Lady Carington was riding with the Master, Mrs. Arthur was out, as devoted to the pursuit as ever, and Mr. Tailby was riding as eagerly to the front as if still directing Goodall. Sir Bache Cunard was present, notwithstanding his sad ill-fortune of over-night—when his stable had caught fire, his most valuable horse had been burned to death, and four others so injured that he had little hope of their recovery. Market Harborough appears to be but thinly patronised this season ; but Kibworth and neighbourhood are quoted higher yearly. The Messrs. Gosling were down as usual ; but the Colonel must have been caught for St. James’ for the day. Captain Featherstonhaugh, Messrs. Cochrane, Lloyd, Logan,

and Major Bethune were also present. And now, without enumerating more names, I must ask leave to get on at once to the sport of the day. Right happy, varied, sport it was, as I hope to show—albeit I have to skim its surface rapidly, and catch its incident but briefly. Tilton Wood, where they met, is, as half the hunting world know, one of a series of strong woods contained in the valley running from Tilton village to Loddington—famous for stout foxes, and linked with the history of hundreds of fine runs. Skeffington Wood is nearest neighbour to that of Tilton; and thither the hounds were first brought—after being carried to the down-wind side of the covert. Hounds were in full voice, and several foxes in full flight almost immediately. Nine couple of hounds left with the first fugitive, and pursuing him through Tugby Wood, drove him straight into Sir Bache's country. The rest of the pack were hard at work in two or three other directions; but were soon brought on to the front by huntsman and whip, whose attention had been thus distracted. So there was necessarily some little delay; the fox gained an advantage that was of no slight use to him on an indifferent scenting morning; and the run was a hunting one where, with luck, it might have been of a truly brilliant character. Its direction was all that could be desired; for it led almost straight to Glooston Wood, over a line of beautiful open grass. Within a field or so of that covert, it turned to Stanton Wood, and bent back to Nosely—embracing the Stanton Brook in its course. The brook is not a waterjump of great proportion; but its banks are rotten, and from one cause or another horses seldom show a great liking for it. At any rate it always reaps a harvest, when hounds cross it; and its bosom was not left unruffled to-day. Some horses "scotched" at taking off, and slid to their doom; others were bogged on landing; and others jumped just far enough to get in. So more than one new pink left its virgin brightness at its banks. After Nosely there was little done. The run lasted altogether about an hour and a half; of which the first twenty minutes or so was pleasant, if not rapid, going.

A second fox was found in Loddington Redditch; put every one in a fluster for ten minutes, as he threaded the woods and then headed for the open; after which he popped underground close to Tugby Village. Tilton Wood was the word next given; first horses were sent home, and most of those men having only one out for the day turned homewards too.

But in Leicestershire all our best runs—if not *all*, at least three out of four—are in the afternoon. Scent is generally better, the field is fewer, and hounds seem to hunt with more determination and power. It was a grand fox that left Tilton Wood, and turned a grey mask to stare at his persecutors ere he reached the first hedge. He had not waited to be found; but he gained very little time by his readiness. Let me pass over how he ran the valley, held to the woods till he broke past Tugby Village, and skirted the gardens of Keythorpe. In Keythorpe Park hounds really settled to run; and it was by the wire round Keythorpe Park that all the foremost riders were pounded, while the pack dashed on to Vowes' Gorse. A happy turn, just short of this, let pursuers up once more; and now came the cream of the run. Bearing towards Allexton, they went at a glorious pace and over a splendid country—a half-circle that, crossing the new railway twice, took them over the Allexton Brook, and widely parallel to it, back into Loddington Redditch (fifty-five minutes from start). Through the wood they held on at once, then towards Tilton till their fox bore southwards again across the valley, and reached the same drain, by Tugby, where the second fox of the day had found shelter. *An hour and a quarter exactly* was the run; and a great good run truly. Prominent in it were Lord Grey de Wilton, Captain Middleton, Messrs. Pennington, Tailby, H. Lowther, W. Chaplin, H. Flower, Logan, and Major Chaplin, with Neal and Goddard. The horses of Mr. Pennington and Mr. Flower were apparently as fresh at the end of the run as at starting (though most of the others were sorely beat); while I must not neglect (though hurrying over my sketch) to add that one lady, Mrs. Franklyn, rode to the end.

CUB HUNTING.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 1ST.

At twelve noon, or thereabouts, the Quorn arrived at Baggrave, to draw the Prince of Wales' Gorse. The blinds were down at the Hall, the Colonel was away, and there was no sideboard to rob the coverts, to tempt men to be careless of a start, or to urge to extra-valorous riding. But the main influence was present in plenty. One fox away, and to ground in the first field (at an unknown and unguarded drain); a second vulp off while the hounds were glued on a third; and the third to ground where another opening made the same drain available. Everybody bristled and rode to the first alarm; everybody did the same, and incurred the hearty wrath of the Master, to the second; while to the last, a fully legitimate start, they all charged, with infinite and various grief, a single fence that all had to jump back again.

Then three mortal hours of chilly, shivering, watchfulness—a merciless north wind penetrating each waistcoat, the mercurial properties of every flask gradually exhausted to zero, and the busiest of cullers drained dry of even his November stories. An obstinate hack—striving his utmost to rub his rider off and hang him on the topmost branches of a bull-fin—gave ten minutes' variety to the cold monotony; and all hands turned out to a flogging match, riding the hack into the open with whip and holloa. This “diversion” over, there was nothing for it but to shiver, while, without a scent, hounds scrimmaged hither and thither with the cubs in the low dense gorse—Firr working his utmost to render the covert untenable. “Tallyho over” in one quarter; and voice and horn at once there to take advantage of the view. “Tallyho over,” immediately in another—a perfect game of Blind Man’s Buff. By 3.30 the field had had enough of it; and went home to get warm. Not

half a dozen were left ; when, at 8.50, a cub really left the gorse, and the signal ran out for the indefatigable pack. From every bush of the gorse, which even in its ill-scenting humour could not daunt them, they sprang to the horn and holloa ; and spread the whole field to catch up the track they were told was there. As straws launched into a stream they struck the current, and converged in its flow. We talk of *scent*. We know nothing even of its influence, its action, or its instinct. The guiding magnetism that appeals to a hound is an element apart and inexplicable. Red herring nor violets could direct a human nose : and that hounds should fling themselves on to the scent of a fox is an allowed phenomenon.

This, though, was not to be a run. The cub was beat already ; and sought only the sanctuary of his patron saint. He reached the laurels of the Hall, and skirted its windows. Huntsman and party clattered through the stableyard, to meet the hounds beyond—only to find half of them puzzling round the house—the others huddled up against the library lattice. No doubt the fox had jumped through the open window ; the hounds would not leave it ; old Wisdom was already inside ; and the others could but with difficulty be prevented from following her. Two or three ready horsemen were out of their saddles in a moment, and into the Colonel's sanctum—searching among iron safes, routing among the archives of the Burnaby family, poking their whips behind rows of ancient volumes, trying every dark corner, and even probing the chimney. Wisdom, too, sniffed about hither and thither, whimpering with excitement. The frightened housemaids flocked in, and, as soon as they were sufficiently recovered, aided diligently in the search. But nowhere could Reynard be found ; and hounds were taken back round the walls and through the shrubbery—for it was certain that he must be hid close by. And so he was. He had jumped at the window in his extremity, turned back from it, and found refuge in a hole in the kitchen garden. A culvert, some twenty yards long, carried the surplus water

from a large open cistern in the garden—and into this moist asylum he had crept. It would be easy enough to dislodge him with a terrier ; and a terrier was quickly brought. The source of the drain was plainly visible about five feet down the cistern, and at the water's edge. But how to reach it, to put the terrier in ? The tank was deep enough to drown a giraffe. The proceedings came to a standstill, and the party looked blank—till the one with the longest legs was moved with happy inspiration. Divesting himself of hat and watch and purse, he lent one lengthy limb to Firr, the other to Will (the second whip) ; then, gripping the terrier by the tail, he was lowered head first into the pit. As one of the gardeners described it rapturously, “ Jack went in with his hacks up ; the fox slipped out at the other end ; ” the bystanders yelled their loudest ; away burst the hounds ; and the diver was nearly dropped into the deep dark water in the confusion. Yet, wet and tired as the fox must have been, he reached, first the shrubberies, then the covert, in safety—and there we were as badly off as ever. Two or three foxes, beat and draggled, crept round the little gorse—the pack mad to get blood, but the scent not strong enough to help them to it. It was a matter no less of wonderment than of pleasure when, in the failing light of 4.30, a fox (strongly recommended by witnesses as the same who had gone before) broke again towards the Hall. And this time he sought no shelter from shrubbery, library, or cistern ; but, bearing up toward Hungerton embarked on to the Quenby pastures. The skeleton field turned in from the Quenby bridle-road to find themselves bound to a most uncompromising line of big fences and stiff new timber. But, whether they liked it or not, they had to ride ; for hounds were rapidly leaving them. So they made the best of their way, as the pack swept round at length to the little brook that runs between Lowesby and Baggrave. Firr's horse slipped right through the low rail bordering it, and rolled his rider completely under water. And this, on the top of his morning fall, and added to a wet ride home—twelve miles at “ hound-pace ” on a bitter cold night—will fully

account for it that we lost our huntsman for Kirby Gate. The scurry, meanwhile, went on, fast if twisting ; and each moment seemed as if it must be their fox's last. But he kept just in front of them for twenty minutes, doubled back to Lowesby, and found yet another open drain—which saved him. He had run over the prettiest country, and given the few men who had lingered a reward that they had not hoped for. |But that hounds went home without a taste of fox-flesh was hard indeed upon them. We can scarcely lay the blame on inadequate earth-stopping ; for each and every one of the holes and drains in which foxes went to ground were newly established refuges.

AT HOME IN A STORM.

FRIDAY (November 15th) was the first day that wind and rain ever kept your employé within-doors, with hounds at hand and horses fit to go. This fact is of consequence to nobody except himself—and only to him as testifying a decadence moral or physical—the first grey hair, the first forehead line, the first victory of self-indulgence over the rigid rule of sport—the first glimmering of sense, perhaps, but a falling-off notwithstanding. Nor is his personality for the public only—except, perhaps, as a gauge, in some measure to indicate the feelings, motives, appreciativeness of that section of society of which he forms a sample unit. Of course one *ought* to have gone hunting in Cording suit, or Pytchley Spencer, or some other ingenious riding-tent. There could be no hope, or chance, of vivid active sport ; but still one ought to have gone out, if only to show one's superiority over the ill will of the elements, and to support the Hunt whose button is one's badge. I confess that, for the first time (I repeat with shame), neither consideration, nor even a sense of duty towards you, Mr. Editor, availed to draw me from the fireside. I wasn't happy though—even with a month's collection of bills and a pile of unanswered correspondence to

beguile the time. For the hours thrown suddenly on hands, idle only because they are disappointed of a fully planned employment, are sure to be wasted—or at best consumed in light and frivolous occupation. My day, I'll venture odds, will answer in the main to that of a few score of others similarly placed—with the object of killing time thus unexpectedly thrust upon them. Breakfast as arranged overnight, as late as consistent with the meet (or rather later). After breakfast a cigarette against a storm-beaten window—the prospect as black and hopeless as may be—the tempest raging pitilessly from the north—and horses counterordered—one only to be kept in readiness should a very unlikely change for the better transpire. Did very little all morning, except get out blotting book, and spread writing-material pretentiously all round; mended two pens; paid frequent visits to the window, ejaculated freely when there, and hoped aloud that Tom Firr wouldn't be out on a day so admirably in favour of lumbago. Breakfast apparently scarcely over when luncheon was announced. Now, if there is one process less than all others in keeping with the habits and instinct of an active man it is sitting down *en famille* to a hot luncheon as part of the business of the day. It is good neither physically nor intellectually, at the time nor in its effects. He is fully aware of this, hates himself during commission of the sin, and still more afterwards—and yet will fall a victim again as soon as temptation offers. After luncheon a banging big cigar, an easy chair and the paper, and to sleep. Woke in a bad temper because people would talk and laugh in the daytime; and so settled sullenly down to the bills. Docketed them neatly; and put them away comfortably to await further orders. A cup of tea now. Drew a covert or two, found a fox and killed him handsomely in the drawing room, to the great edification of the terriers and with splendid accompaniment of voice and horn. Got turned out of this; so sat down and went in for letter-writing. Began each with the remark that one had been too busy to answer his or hers before, told him or her that post was going, begged that

haste would be excused, and asked that he or she would write again very soon. Then an hour among the bookshelves,—a scrap here, a page there, Somerville and Shakespeare, Burnand and Burns, Mark Twain and Alfred Tennyson—a taste of each is better than a surfeit of any one, especially for a memory like a waste paper basket. Capital day for looking over the guns, that have been lying by a month or two. Found them rusty. Accordingly proceeded to clean and lay out well-oiled fragments on each piece of furniture within reach, which shortly, and not unnaturally, brought down the wrath of the housewife. Wondered what women do when they don't hunt—and we do. They can't order dinner all day. Very fortunate for them that they should have us at home thus, once in the fortnight—and the more so that our conversation under such circumstances is so brilliantly entertaining—its sole subjects being the disgusting appearance of the weather and the extreme hardship of being thus pent up in their society. Dinner next, and a marvellous appetite considering disappointment endured, want of exercise, and the shattered constitution that kept one within-doors. But they say they were very cold and wet outside; and had only a slow afternoon hunt from Hungerton Foxholes to Norton.

THE BELVOIR AT HOME AND ABROAD.

WEDNESDAY, Nov. 27th.—The Belvoir at Waltham. If there could be variance of opinion as to the pace hounds travelled yesterday, there will be little argument on the subject of to-day. It was a thorough *Belvoir burst*—bright, bustling, and brilliant. Let us pass over the morning, when from Melton Spinney, starting close to their fox, they were headed back just at the Melton Brook—*by a pedlar*, forsooth. What in Heaven's name could a pedlar, and his pack, have been doing by the side of Melton Brook? And what wares could he have hoped to sell there, unless he brought a stock

of cordials in view of immersions? The headed fox led over plough for ten minutes, then to ground. And from the holloa forward on a second one nothing accrued.

On the way to Brentingby Spinney a farmer told of an old fox curled up where he could keep his eye on the fowls of the homestead. "Tallyho-back" gave the information that he had been disturbed, and had run his head against the whip at the Melton corner; and they who galloped to the first scream had just time to pull up to the last syllable, when a gay brave customer flung himself over the stubble across their front. Hounds were at him before he cleared the field; and skimmed the four first fiendish arables at a speed that defied approach. Then they hit the grass; a hedge-cutter had hindered the fox; and he was in sight as they cut a corner and swung down towards Freeby Village. The field turned quick over the side fence to their right. Brentingby Spinney, from which they had started, is but a little place, and all were there or near. A small plantation lay beside the bottom; and the pack drove through it, before bearing still more to the right, over the strong-fenced nullah. Now they had crossed it, and struck up the field beyond with the lightning quickness of the Belvoir—and the field were checked. The fence was guarded by an extra post-and-rail; and the watercourse stretched deep and wide beyond. But there was no help or alternative. Mr. Baldock drove at it in one spot, Sir Beaumont Dixie in another. No fall, but a scramble and gallant recovery in either instance; two men down elsewhere—and the rest waited till a breach was effected in the rampart. The pack were nearly a field ahead, and kept it. They rose the hill, and the tail hounds were the beacons over the brow. Mr. Ernest Chaplin had thrown an eye forward, and caught a view, as Reynard had dipped down to the copse in the bottom; so had ridden inside the difficulty, and now was leading pursuit. A locked gate hindered a trio dropping from the clouds. The others dipped under a tree, and drove and thrust after the flying pack. Two dense black bulfinches, which weight and pace alone could pierce; and next

a second wide deep bottom—its fence impenetrable and high where hounds crossed, and no apparent possible opening. Bearing right and left, the leaders went for its first practicable points, and gladly found themselves beyond. Hounds were well ahead flying on the fresh hot scent; and the ground was fetlock deep. But on the big pastures of Thorpe Arnold the pack had no longer the best of it: and once again the three were with them on terms satisfactory.

Their fox was yielding to the killing pace, and now he bore up towards the spot from which he had started. A half-laid wire took a moment's thought and search: and soon they entered a turnip-field, with hounds in full drive. The wet mud must have hung, and smothered the scent. The leading hounds threw up their heads when carrying a straight continuous line: wavered and stood for a second or two, as if the tremendous pace had told also upon them. And this, if I may be permitted to hazard the opinion, explains the check. The leading hounds were *blown*. For, though the track lay onwards, they would not stoop for it at once. As a holloa sounded forward, it was proposed that one of the party should carry them to it; but this was not acted upon. Gillard soon came up, hit the scent just forward of where they had abandoned it, and the party increased its strength by a score. Eighteen minutes it had been to the check, when their fox was only just out of view. Running on almost as fast, they made it twenty-seven—when, with their fox so beat that he crawled into a hedgerow, among the horsemen and not a hundred yards before hounds, a fresh one jumped up in front, took them three fields on, and spoiled a fine finish. Of the run fox I have only to add that he gained Melton Spinney (though when last viewed he might have been caught by a man on foot), recovered his wind, and, favoured by the inferior scent of the afternoon, still wears his brush.

Monday, Nov. 25th.—The Quorn at Lodge-on-the-Wolds. The term Wold I have only learned to define as betokening inferior land and an infamous hunting country—perhaps a

combite word of which *old* and *wild* are the components. It is *old* because it has never been found worth while to redeem it from its original primitive culture ; and it is *wild* because it is too poor and weak to tempt civilisation. There is an errant population scattered over it, of the Afredee and Momund description—and the whole tribe was turned loose on this Martinmas Monday. That they should seek to eke out their holiday in connection with foxhunting is a point on which we give them our fullest sympathy. And we held a Martinmas Fair round Roehoe. But there was a *bonne bouche* left for the afternoon ; and the men of Melton wetted their lips in anticipation. “The Curate” was known to be full of foxes ; and was to be drawn when Firr had done his duty by the stranger offspring of the more “old-fashioned sporting plough.” (What a hateful adjective is that “old-fashioned” ! An “old-fashioned” run is to us of the “new fangled school” as hateful as an obsolete bonnet is to a woman. It means something dowdy, detestable, and out of date. We don’t hunt on the same lines as our ancestors ; and, thank Heaven, we don’t pretend to. We don’t rise when a fool of a cock gives the signal ; but prefer to use our own judgment, to find our fox at a rational hour, rather than drag up to “his lair in the” chilly dew of the “morning”). The plough was not done with till three o’clock ; and at last a move was made for the promised Curate. “Twenty minutes across to Dalby Wood wouldn’t be a bad thing ? Even a scurry to Willoughby would do ! while, if we have luck we might drop in for an out-and-outer over the Vale !” Second horses are only just mounted, and we didn’t expect much fun in the morning ! So let us to The Curate, full of confidence and hope assured. Well, they have been very smart in sending the whips on. There’s a cap at every corner. Establishments fully manned—and alive to their work too. That’s how we like to see things done. But hullo ! a *horn* too ! A whisper—a solemn awesome whisper sneaks into our ears. *The Belvoir are in the Curate !* Our last draw for the day, and Gillard hard at work scattering the litter, till his own fox

should break. Oh, it's *awful!* A silence now, such as even the noisiest—and most irreverent—dare not break; while in the distance, like sounds of wanton revelry, re-echo the desecrating tones of horn and hound. Even Tom Firr does not smile, nor laugh aloud. Have you ever seen that picture at Munich, of Apollo about to flay Marsyas—the result and wager of their musical combat? It has no bearing, of course, on the present crisis—but have you seen it?

But a shrill repeated scream breaks the spell, at least to those who can take an unofficial view of matters. And twenty men rush off to the stranger horn, to which hounds are streaming from the covert. Nature—human, fox hunting nature, can't resist the call. And forsaking their colours the men of Quorn chime in with the foreigners—"just to see that fair play is enacted." Fair play they see, and are witnesses, moreover, to the fact that Gillard kills his fox (a veteran thoroughly run to death) in another twenty minutes' hunting. He had brought him from Hose Covert across the Vale—quick and sharp past Sherbrook's Covert over a capital line (grass all the way) by Parson's Thorns into The Curate—to kill him, as we have seen, close to Widmerpool Village, and to spoil the Quorn afternoon.

GEORGE WHYTE MELVILLE.

LIKE a black heavy cloud, choking the breath and pressing on the heart with its cold damp weight, came the news that spread from mouth to mouth at the Quorn meet at Rearsby (Friday last, December 6th). "What, *Whyte Melville* of all men?" was the one first utterance of the hundred who there learned the loss of a dear friend, were there told of the sudden awful death of the man who in himself was almost the life and voice of foxhunting, and there heard that the Chase had brought the end of the one that it least of all could spare. It is not so much of *Whyte Melville* the writer, the poet, I am

Albula Thruel

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speaking. But of Whyte Melville the kindly friend, the genial fellow sportsman, the hearty companion, the courteous chivalrous gentleman. As a writer he was known *everywhere*; but it was so he was known and valued in Leicestershire—as in Gloucester, Northampton, Dorset, Devon, and Somerset. Wherever he lived he endeared himself. Wherever he rode, he rode for the love of hunting—without selfishness, without jealousy, and that, while others enjoyed themselves, he too might do so according to his bent. His was a nature that, while finding a leading pleasure in the study of others, was never cynical, bitter, or unkind. Where smaller minds could make wit and jest out of failings in those round him, he was ready, with ten times the humour, to make fun and story of material that injured no one directly or indirectly. He busied himself, as I have said, in the study of those near him. But it was that he might learn their special interests, and bring home to himself their peculiar tastes. And thus it was that scarce anyone exchanged a morning greeting with Whyte Melville, but to go on his way delighted that his life had something in it that met sympathy from without—and, better still, the sympathy of a man whose sympathy was worth having. For, out of the natural kindheartedness of a clever man, grew the knack and habit, which at all times prompted him to say the right thing—a nice thing—to whomever he was thrown across. And he proved his sincerity by speaking no differently behind his neighbour's back than to his face. So men loved him. Englishmen do not often speak thus of their fellows; but many a man *will* say thus, or think thus, now Whyte Melville is dead. I mean to write no studied panegyric; but I must be allowed expression as one who looked up to him with admiration not only, but with affection, and who knows something of the feeling, evident and evinced, of others of a certain section. In Whyte Melville there was nothing antagonistic. He never, with all his acknowledged genius, sought to pit himself or his opinions in combat. He never came roughly against the susceptibilities of his comrades, even to indulge his vivid sense of humour. To meet him in the morning was a warming gleam

of sunshine. To ride home with him at night was a cheery sunset. He was not, generally, deemed a surpassing horseman. He went out to amuse himself, and did it thoroughly—seeing a great deal of hounds, and picking his own way where he and his horse could best learn to adjust themselves to each other's taste. Nothing was more pleasant to him than to educate a willing well bred pupil to jump to his hand and gallop on the finger. I fancy I can see him in that last canter—sitting down in his saddle, his head bent over to watch “the snort and strain on the yielding rein” as he “humoured the” too-willing “mare,” his hands down almost on the pommel, and all the while he kept up a pleasant flow of talk with whoever rode beside him. If his death was a sudden one, and to his friends a terrible stunning blow, I trust there is nothing impious in the thought that perhaps he himself—who pleaded that man's most worthy death was in harness, and that it were better ever that fruit should be gathered when ripe rather than be left to fall from the tree,—would have chosen his farewell thus, in the midst of the glorious pursuit he had made especially his own. *Indeed*, he died when his fruit was yet ripe; and he died in the zenith of his fame as an author. He has died when his own world will lament him, wring their hands bitterly over their grievous loss, and sorrow earnestly for Whyte Melville. Was there something prophetic, in that the last lines he published were entitled *Farewell?* Surely, at any rate, there was an augury in those former words of his (ringing now for nights past in my ears),

It's worth the risk of life and limb and neck, boys,
To see them glance and stoop
Till they finish with who-whoop,
Forty minutes o'er the grass without a check, boys.

Only a Postscript *in memoriam*. There have been paragraphs with large-letter headings written for the multitude; and there have been words of vivid heart-felt sorrow printed for sympathetic eyes. But his own words give it more plainly, more feelingly, more tearfully now, than any outside utterance. Why have they not been quoted? “To me it seems that there

may come a time when to have given gold for silver in every relation of life shall be the one consoling reflection—a time perhaps of hushed voices, stealthy footsteps, and a darkened room, growing yet strangely darker with every breath we draw. *Or a time of earth-stained garments, and bespattered friends proffering silver hunting-flasks in sheer dismay, and a favourite horse brought back with flying stirrups, dangling rein, and its mane full of mud, while the dull grey sky wheels above and the dank tufted grass heaves below ; nor in the intervals of a pain, becoming every moment less keen, can we stifle the helpless consciousness that, before our crushed frame shall be lifted from its wet slippery resting place, it will be time to die.*" He gave *Gold for Silver while he could*. I take the extract from "*BONES AND I*"—not his best book, but containing some of his richest, deepest, and best thought. It makes one *very very* sad to read this chapter now. Read it, brother sportsmen, and say if any but a good, a thoughtful, or a noble man could have written it. It chanced that, but a few evenings ago, three or four of us (we were not *all* illiterate) tried hard, and searched wide, to find a plain definition for the word *philosophy*. *Analysis of Nature—human nature more especially*, was, if not the most accurate, at least more compatible with our ideas that we could frame. Had we sought to prove the definition by instance, we need have looked no further than *Gold and Silver*, as Whyte Melville thought it out in "*BONES AND I*."

We hunted on Friday, though our hearts were not in it, and the weather was against us. Hounds moved off about twelve, the roads being at the time like adamant and the fallows capable of carrying a wagon. Bleakmore had nothing in it, and then they struck across country a mile or so, by a line of gaps and gates, to a snug little plantation hitherto unknown. It has been planted by Mr. Cheney, of Gaddesby, and though but very recently built, it already avails as a harbourage. Now there were at least a brace of foxes up at once, and hounds were out after one without noise or commotion. The only way to get after them was to jump into the spinney—thence to

emerge over a very plausible ditch-and-rail. And a dozen sportsmen at once proceeded to avail themselves of the route. But once inside they became huddled together, terribly in each other's way. One of the most dressy of them dropped his hat exactly in the gangway, and implored piteously that it might not be trodden on. "It was *quite new*, and the only one he had!" Courtesy and fellow-feeling could not withstand the appeal; a deadlock ensued; and I verily believe we should all have been there now, had not a graceless (I use the word only in reference to his unfraternal behaviour) younger brother seized delightedly upon the chance, to ride straight at the hat and drive it, a silken ruin, into the bottom of the ditch—pursuing his way with a heartless chuckle. The spell was broken; the beaver-dam was burst; and the flood of horsemen poured through, to ride for Gaddesby. A frost-bound road held them to a hand canter; a sharp turn took hounds suddenly away from them; and for a quarter of an hour the pack had quite the best of them—daringly though they clattered over the intervening fences and hard-glazed ridge-and-furrow in pursuit. Thus they were led between Gaddesby and Brooksby till scent failed near Cream Gorse.



FOX-HUNTING IN THE SNOW.

FROST and snow, notwithstanding, we have had more than one good day's sport in the week that is past—sport, too, that we could really see, and even ride to! Sir Bache Cunard has been hunting regularly, and gaining no mean triumphs in his battle with the elements—as you shall see.

On all the uppermost level of High Leicestershire the snow lies thick; and, having settled there before the frost could touch the ground, now keeps the surface warm and almost soft. It is only here and there, where the snow has been blown aside, that the turf refuses to yield; and these are the spots to be avoided. Elsewhere horses' feet sink deep enough, galloping is fair and feasible, and jumping possible. The existence of a ditch can only be guessed at; and of the whereabouts of a hole there is no sign. But it is safer to chance a snowdrift than to hazard the glassy surface of bare ground.

Of Wednesday (January 29th) I can give my own impressions. A postcard said twelve at Keythorpe; and thither we accordingly sallied, on a dull cheerless morning, with the east wind driving a blinding sleet in our faces, till eyes shed painful tears and every feature tingled and ached. The sky was leaden almost to blackness; the broad green fields of which we make our boast were now a bleak white desert, crossed and cut with thin black lines, as far as the sight could reach through the clear cold atmosphere. The Coplow alone stood out—like a black edition of the Holy Mountain of Japan—a landmark for all Leicestershire. Horses curled their backs, shook their heads and snorted, as they breathed the fresh crisp air; and gambolled on the ice-covered road till it seemed as if not even frost-shoes could save a fall. Indeed, the first half-mile from stables is, at any rate to my timorous mind, the most terrifying portion of a day's hunting in the frost. Clattering along the wheel-beaten track, sliding round icy corners, it was hard to believe that sane men were going a-hunting. But we

returned to find we had done nothing so very mad ; brought back "a sound mind in a sound body," consider that both are all the better for it, and look forward to repeating the process very shortly. Know, then, that we took our start from the Quorn country, where the snowfall has been scantier ; and such Arctic fashion of fox-hunting would (except round Lowseby, Billesdon Coplow, Quenby and Baggrave) be impracticable. But, as we issued from the plain on to the heights of Cold Newton, the lanes had been choked with snowdrifts, now cut through to leave a three-feet wall on either side ; while every field was covered to a depth of several inches. Already, too, a happy omen had shed a radiance across our path and over our spirits. In the middle of an open field, whom should we meet but Bold Reynard himself, sauntering leisurely along in the daylight, fully convinced that hunting was a dormant or a dead pursuit. The sight of three horsemen booted and spurred was a sharp shock to his misguided mind ; and the familiar view holloa sent him scurrying off to wonder and soliloquy in the security of the gorse hard by.

At one o'clock punctuality was rewarded by the sight of hounds just breaking up their fox in Vowes' Gorse—the second they have been unfortunate enough to chop in this covert during the last ten days. And round or near the pack stood—not *half-a-dozen* wild enthusiasts as we had expected, but a field of *fifty!* Indeed, half the Hunt were there ; and had already acquired the confidence begotten of previous successful experiment. The following were some among them—Sir Bache and the Misses Cunard, Mrs. Arthur, Mr. and Miss Braithwaite, Miss Studd, Lord Manners, Colonel and Messrs. F. and H. Gosling, Captains J. Baillie, Pennington, and Goodchild, Messrs. Duncan, Lloyd, Douglass, Simpson, Arkwright, Allcard, Crane, Coleman, Foster, &c. ; while Neal, the huntsman of the Cottesmore, was in attendance to study a new branch of the art. The Hunt servants were in full orthodoxy of colour and costume. For the others, covert-coats, woollen-gloves, and in some cases comforters, were the pre-

vailing *mode*. But the distinguishing fashion was something entirely novel as an article of hunting kit, though in future no member of the B.H. Hunt will be considered to possess a complete outfit without it. This was no more nor less than a pair of thick felt *snow-shoes*, buckling down the leg and enveloping the whole of the butcher-boot. (N.B. Spurs will not be worn on this parade. By order.) There can be no doubt about the appropriateness of these highly original garments for the work they are intended to serve. They not only keep the feet delightfully warm; but they protect the inner boot from snow, when the wearer descends for the constantly recurring necessity for rail-breaking. For though, again and again, you may assure yourself that a fence has *most likely* no ditch on the take-off side, and may cram over it fast enough to attain a probability of clearing any ordinary dug-out beyond the hedge, it requires a very full faith in the generosity of Providence to allow of tilting best pace at a stout oxer, with the ditch a wide problem in front. The Colonel does it, and will no doubt do it again; but the rest of us don't, by any means.

The sport of the day was a run of *two hours and twenty minutes*, and held its way much as follows. The death and worry in Vowes' Gorse could be heard far and near in the frosty air; and the foxes of Keythorpe took warning at once. So two at least had gone, when the farther plantations were now drawn. Holloas resounded from every hillside; for the walking public were afoot and fully alive to the fun. The sporting shepherd welcomed the change; the brickmakers, frozen from their occupation in the neighbouring yard, made high holiday; and stablemen with breeches of excruciating tightness straddled stiffly round the covert side. After trying in vain for a fox still left in his lair, there was no alternative for the huntsman but to press forward on to the line of one of the early fugitives. And thus they hunted slowly away towards Noseley and (the reader who knows the Keythorpe gullies, and the ways of the Keythorpe foxes, will not be sur-

prised to hear) they found themselves ere long working round and back to the place of starting. They had travelled long enough to show the uninitiated that it was safe to canter over a grass field ; and to teach a horse that it did not quite pay to plunge his forefeet blindly into each snowdrift. A single little fence had been successfully encountered, the man had gathered courage, and the steed had learned sobriety. So when they went northwards from Keythorpe, with their fox holloaed away close before them, there was quite a dash upon the line of hounds. A flock of sheep caused an unfortunate check in the otherwise smart gallop to Allexton Wood ; and some of the prettiest hunting was over the few light-fenced fields between there and Wardley. A quarter-hour spent here (where the beautifully kept rides were soft and firm as tan) ; then back (undoubtedly with a fresh fox), into Allexton. They worked the line through, with ten minutes' the worst of it. Then they could only potter for five more ; and right and left it was worded that the chase was "over," and that we had seen an "excellent hunting run." Accepting the latter phase, we soon had to give up the former. Hounds were away again down a fallow, whose jagged edges stood up like granite above the snow. A clean jump, into ground whose velvety feel at once told it was grass, was the first of a jolly series that opened out a new experience. With a curiously improved scent, there was clattering and scrambling where the next gap gave glass to jump over and grass to jump into. There was the crack of a hammer, the groan of shaken joints, when there came a horrid five-foot drop on to a bare dry surface—and conscience re-echoed the groan for the good bold horse that had jumped his farthest. There was battering, wrenching, hammering, and excited halloaing, when the Foot Guards were clearing away obstructive *chevaux-de-frise* ; and many a spring was made from a ditch-bottom, that was meant to take its source from firm ground two feet above. But there was no fall, nor a single lamed horse : and it was a twenty minutes' hot going that matches in description with nothing I ever saw

before. The Messrs. Gosling, the Master, Mr. Marshall, Summers and Shepherd (huntsman and whip) were all in close pursuit of the Colonel's grey. Thus merrily up to Hallaton Village, when time was called, as above. Two foxes were in front—one to Stockerston, and the other (I had nearly written a terrible Irishism) back towards Keythorpe; so hounds were taken home. I can sum up only to the effect that this was the brightest day I have seen for eight solid weeks. Once or twice a week like this will save us many a groan and grumble. Believe me, it is better riding under such unmistakable conditions than when you attempt to hurry a thaw too quickly into hunting weather. And a day like this rouses the spirit, quickens the blood, and stirs the system, when all three have been growing gradually and lamentably stagnate. Weather (and a due allowance of snow) permitting, the same pack may be seen at Allexton on Monday next—11 a.m.

WATERLOO GORSE AND THRUSSINGTON GORSE.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13TH.

GLORIOUS weather and glorious sport again. We are up in our stirrups now—making the most of our fortune, and bent on making the most of it to the end. Since in abject despair I posted my last few lugubrious lines, there has been merriment for the most despondent, food for the hungriest, medicine for the most dyspeptic: and we are thriving heartily. No need nor time to dwell or ponder now. Events have followed each other in one continued stream, and we are swimming on the pleasant waters still. For the items see below.

It was a huge, and, apparently, a happy throng that mustered in the Market Harboro' Ball room on Thursday night (Feb. 6th); and fully half that throng—*undoubtedly* hearty and happy—joined the Pytchley at Arthingworth the next day. They had been given till noon to recover themselves; and in highest

spirits they turned up, albeit many a bright complexion was paled, and many a manly eye bore little of its accustomed gloss. They were once more in the saddle, and in the field; once again there was a chance of vigorous action, and a vent for the pent-up energy of nine weeks' accumulation.

Waterloo Gorse is a name of fame—a name that falls with a murmur of melody in old ears, that wakens a stirring memory for the middle aged, and sends an extra glow into the veins of youth and enthusiasm. It is hallowed in half-forgotten story; it is honoured in recent tale, and a halo hovers round it that will last as long as you and I, reader, are above the bright green sod. Enthroned on a gentle eminence amid what I am safe in terming the stiffest country in England, it forms the central point of an arena wherein no combatant competes with real success, unless he can trust truly in his heart and in his horse. On every side the big bullock fields stretch away for miles, intersected by fences that are practicable only here and there, to the boldest and the best. And for this reason, grand as are the associations of Waterloo Gorse, it is not as favourite a covert as many another of humbler fame. On one side (that of the railway) there is great difficulty in getting away with hounds, and in most directions it is almost impossible to ride straight to them when away. On this warm moist morning there was a field that hungered for a ride, that revelled in the rain, and threw off their coats to welcome the new sensation of hunting weather. They clustered round the gorse (the black-thorn, except for old denomination); and they left no corner unguarded. There was a note in covert, a long stillness, then a little vixen fox jumping out among listless idlers of the pack. In again, and a brushing scrimmage within the thicket. A crash and chorus that we haven't heard for weeks, a distant yell—and we are almost left behind. 'Tis of no interest how fox and hounds worked a short circle outside; but a different thing when they "leathered" to it on the grass beyond. "Hounds can't run!" Can't they? Keep with them now! Follow Goodall on that little bit of a grey, as he flicks over quickset

oxer, and rail. You never thought of the extra timber that he left under the wide plashed hedge. You can't believe in the hole he found in the high growing bullfinch. You are glad that Lord Spencer smashed the far rail; and you wondered why Mr. Tailby shouted for "pace!" Mr. Langham is near enough to follow; and Mr. Henry is close in his wake. Ah, 'tis a jolly moment, to open your lungs, and to thank Heaven the world contains hunting. To the rocketting bound of a good free horse you catch your breath, thankfully, happily. Why doesn't this last for ever? Why don't hounds *always* run? Why don't *all* horses jump free? Why is there so much prose in life? Why—well, they are running too hard for more questions—and 'twas a hearty fifteen minutes that brought us to Loatland Wood. I (who speak only as one of a mass) felt better—ten years better, for the scurry. And in half an hour we killed our beaten fox in covert, and with satisfaction saw him eaten.

Then we started on a slow dull line (foxhunting, though, and therefore pleasant) and killed a fat animal in the next hour. A pommel-high stream had to be waded—and waded it was, too, by two ladies, the Misses Mackenzie (who, with Mrs. E. Kennard, had been thoroughly placed in the previous gallop).

Now we get on to Monday last, Feb. 11th. The Quorn at Sixhills—a day that in itself made amends for a month of frost. Thrußington Gorse was the source of that happy morning gallop. The field clustered and quivered on its southernmost edge, while the faint sounds of hound and horn came up the wind, to hold them in blind anxiety. A fox gone here; another there—and the pack still audible in covert. How the crush, the crash, and the scramble came, I can scarcely tell you even now. Or how hounds and huntsman were through the Wold of Thrußington so quickly. Penned up in a mob, one's part is so atomic, and one's initiatory action so conglomerate, that the memory presents but a misty scene in which one has a dim undefined notion of having taken a part. I remember the deep struggle (some yards of which was per-

formed on one's horse's head) through the Wold Wood. I remember two narrow fields of plough (the same we met at starting in our last gallop from the wood), and I know well the two blind fences that hedge them. After these, the scene opens out upon wide acres of grass, good fair fences coming quick and big—fifty men on honourable terms with hounds, and the pack holding their own, with a head half a field broad. A lovely sight and a stirring scene, as they swept down to Hoby—all grass, all galloping, room for everyone, the pace magnificent, and the best bit of country in the Hunt. No one was foremost. But most of the good men were there—Firr, of course, close in the wake of his hounds ; and almost equally of course Mr. Coupland beside him — Messrs., captains, and esquires all going as quick as men could ride—Leatham, Brocklehurst, Beaumont, Ashton, Adair, Lubbock, Cart, Robertson, and forty others almost abreast—with half a dozen ladies among the number. I can hardly tell you how they reached Hoby—so quick, confusing, and exciting was the trip. But the scurry over the grass met no check for fifteen to eighteen minutes—and then there came hunting, with a burst fox in front : and of course they killed him. They hunted him, a horseshoe line, by Thrussington, round northwards to Segrave ; coursed him out of a farmyard with his back up and his brush drooping, and worried him under some faggots hard by—fifty-three minutes and a true good hunt from find to finish. That first burst was heavenly : the rest was better than the worse half of one's life.

THE PUNCHBOWL RUN.

ALL else of the week, all else of the year, pales before the run of Saturday. My pen may have rusted in the frost ; my right hand have grown stale with repetition of subject. But I must put this before you if I can. I must be pardoned a free use of names ; and I must crave forgiveness for all error of

omission and commission. I can only give the impressions of a looker-on, and plead that in such case the looker-on sees much—not all—of the game.

You know the Punchbowl, reader, and its nestling copse, girt on three sides by close precipitous hill. You know it to be one of the best prized treasures of the Cottesmore; you remember its fame in Mr. Tailby's most successful days; and for years you have thanked the Hartopp family that they made it the apple of their eye.

As hounds entered it on the afternoon of Saturday last, a dense chilly fog swept up its mouth, wrapping it in so dense a gloom that even Captain Hartopp's herculean form was hidden, as on his giant horse he watched the ride cutting the three-acre hollow. We will touch, perhaps, on the morning's doings by-and-bye. For the present their interest is swamped by greater things. Let it suffice that scent had been weak, but that Neal had worked a short running fox to death round and about Stapleford, that men had mounted their second horses, had grumbled a little that they were "not in luck to-day," and were now all alive for whatever turn fortune might take. Now, reader, as you have done before, you shall ride—not *my* horse, but such an one as is not to be found in Melton. He shall carry you through dirt without faltering, and through difficulty without danger. You may sit still on him, and see what others are doing, while *you* sail freely along. I will answer for your mount. For your vision I can only promise my best. At the entrance to the Punchbowl Gap, you leave the greater company awaiting the turn of events below; and, grasping Perfection's mane, clamber up the greasy staircase to the Punchbowl's rim. "'Tis ever easier to get down than up," you argue; and a score of others—Lord Carrington, Mr. and Mrs. Cecil Chaplin, Captain Jacobson, Messrs. Harter, Beaumont, Custance, &c., among them—argue the same. And although all these names recur again, the argument proved itself wrong. For in the thick fog the keenest sight could not penetrate fifty yards; and the huntsman's voice rose vaguely from a dark undefined abyss.

Never was truer prophecy uttered than was couched in the Meltonian's muttered caution, as his horse plunged up the ascent, "Steady, old man, there *may* be galloping yet!" "Hope there will be," you answer audibly, and pull your own struggling animal into a quiet crawl. But the Punchbowl is bristling, echoing already. A brace of foxes show their heads where the upper group is gathered, and retire hurriedly together—the one a grey old rogue, the other a perfect leviathan in vulpine shape. A third, a tiny red vixen, flashes through the bushes near. But it is the leviathan with whom the fun is to be, and whose destiny is sealed. Goddard's shrill scream rises through the mist; Neal's horn cuts the fog; and you must go—somehow, somewhere. You have chosen your fate above, and by your choice you must abide. So gallop and go now, though you gallop in uncertainty, and you go in half-despair. The horn rings again out of the valley; the cry is still swelling below. Neither is nearer towards you; but the sounds recede, and hope grows fainter. With circus-like rapidity you sweep round the edge of the gully, dipping under overhanging branch of ash and oak, floundering over rabbit-holes, and slipping over tree-roots. Now you see how affairs have been going, and now you are pushing on no longer in the dark. The pack has broken towards Pickwell; is a field ahead of you; and you find as the fog lifts slightly, you are no better than fiftieth in the rush. Right and left, pink and black are flinging over the fences to gain the wirebound Dalby and Pickwell road, already crowded for the only crossing. Into the bordering spinney you take your turn, and splash in and out of the muddy brook, to gain the grass on the right bank. Mr. Hugh Lowther keeps the left bank, followed only by Lord Helmsley and Mr. L. Flower; hounds favour him in the next quarter mile; recross the strong fenced brook where no one can follow them; and give him a turn of which he makes fullest use as they rise the Leesthorpe big field and its short deep furrows. Colonel Forester, too, has remained below the Punchbowl mouth; then leaving the high plantation on

his right, darts into the road to lead the field along the right bank of the stream—as, over wet and broken grass, they hurry on till they can bear up again to hounds. Captain Hartopp remains in the lane (I allude still to the Dalby and Pickwell road) to warn all who come of the wire for whose removal he has laboured for years; then sets to work after Mr. Lowther—and eventually performs the best feat of the run. For, with fully sixteen stone up, he is well in it from find to finish. Hounds are now pointing for Berry Gorse; and no one alongside but Mr. Lowther, till they swing round to Leesthorpe—a lucky turn that deserves more gratitude and congratulation than it has, or is ever likely to receive. Now, reader, you can join in with Neal and with the whole galloping frenzied body, as from the cross roads of Leesthorpe they pound the granite for Stapleford. Admit you have never seen a hound for the past several minutes, till you catch them flying down the stubblefield on the right. Hustle out of the road where you can escape the thundering mass. You can gallop even arable down-hill; and you have stiffer work than this before you still. Your head is for Whissendine village now; two quick fences next, and then what I may term the pseudo-Whissendine (the stream leading on under Laxton's covert) is below you. Its brink is reached by fifty men almost abreast—hounds speeding onwards, now and throughout, as you seldom see them run—not a falter in their straining pace, and every note a whimper. With a bridge within fifty yards, Captain Jacobson takes the water as it comes, lights upon grass, and scores a triumph which he maintains, deservedly and determinedly, to the end. Mr. Harter, Lord Manners, Mr. G. Leigh, and others, hit off the bridge in their stride. But the bridge has a gate; and the gate is fastened as it cannot be opened from horseback. It is only a moment to turn round and jump on to the low-parapeted brickwork; but it is a precious moment with a pack on the wing as now. And now, instead of sound turf, they are on the most choking plough that ever defied a horse. They daren't trot; they can't take a pull. The test must be put;

and horses are sent through the two next fields to maintain their honour and pronounce their pedigree. You and Perfection, reader, make nothing of it ; but skim into the grass beyond to take easy note of things as they go. You may cap on the tail-hounds ; you may cheer Captain Jacobson and the good brown as they draw up to the leaders ; and you may cry *Forrard* to Mr. Harter and his contingent as they strike the grass in pursuit. You will note how, right and left, the front now extends full four hundred yards broad. Hounds are streaming up a hedgerow a field to the right of the Whissendine and Stapleford road. Captain Jacobson leads the van, jumping fence for fence in their wake. Mr. Harter, on his strong bay, rides next, with Mr. Beaumont on one of his neat thoroughbreds, giving him just time to land fairly over each leap. Mr. Leatham is allowing some three stone to the last named, and has nothing like the "quality" under him, but he drives forward with a determination that almost defies weight. And right forward among this central group Mrs. Molyneux glides along—doing as full justice to Lord Grey de Wilton's silver-tailed brown as even his bold owner could have done. Lord Manners is well up ; and Mr. Clayton is riding a splendid old steeplechaser.

Captain Ashton on the right is as forward as anyone, and is pioneer to a strong following on that side. Parallel again on the left are Lord Helmsley, Captain Brocklehurst, and Mr. Flower ; and hitting off the road alongside are Neal, Colonel Forester, Mr. and Mrs. Cecil Chaplin (he on a stout good bay, she on the black Onyx), and half a dozen others—galloping their best on the hard level, yet unable to gain a yard on hounds. You may glance round to the crash of the new ash palisades. The breakage is none of Lord Carington's. The old horse (once the best of his Melton stud) retains at least his talent for timber ; and, blown as he is, leaves no leg behind him ; but the next comer smashes all before him for the public weal. Every fence takes more and more jumping : the pace is awful ; even the turf is fetlock deep ; and each furrow sucks

like quagmire. As the chase passes the right of Whissendine village the front closes up, and crosses a road at almost a single point. The stream of the dreaded Whissendine is here but a young and easy brook ; and better still, there is a useful open bridge.

Flying onwards hounds are pointing for Ranksboro'. In the dim fog you can just discern their darting forms ; but you have better guidance in the black coats of the two leading horsemen, and the hogmane tells you that the pink at their heels can only be Mr. Lowther. In the hurry of such moments the eye catches and retains memory of horses rather than of men. The incident, the action belongs to the horses : the riders are for the time but ciphers in your notice. You mark well what horse is galloping alongside or past you, you know what horse springs the fence before or beside you ; and you judge how you are holding your own or losing ground by the striding forms that your eye can include, though fixed intent on your own difficult course.

The terrible strain of the past twenty minutes is beginning to tell its tale. There is rapping and scrambling over the timbered corner next the Whissendine ; there is choking and sobbing and stopping when another hill top brings a deep seed field. I could say whose career found its check in a ditch bottom ; and I could tell whose chesnut could be driven no more. There is shouting at each gap such as in Meath is the usual accompaniment to the ash plant down the shoulder, but in Leicestershire is only heard in direst extremity. A dozen men are together now ; and few of them care about the stiff rails scraped by Neal's grey.

A long black belt of trees—25 minutes by the watch—where are we ? It is the Fishpond Spinney of Cold Overton. Surely 25 minutes never passed more quickly, evolved more incident, or contained a more exciting struggle ! Panting, steaming horses, flushed and perspiring men, flanks heaving, faces beaming—distress and happiness brightly commingled. Besides those with whose names I have already made free, there were

present at this moment Captain Candy (in spite of two falls), Captain Boyce, Messrs. Gerald Paget, Custance, J. Behrens, Creke, Younger, and several more. (I cannot dare a complete list.)

They think the run is over; they call it a brilliant burst. Flasks are produced, congratulation given, and cigars offered. But, beyond that circle of fog and steam, the chase is still proceeding. Neal can only count half his hounds, and has by no means accounted for his fox: so he, at least, is restless—if others are satisfied. A holloa over the hill tells him there is something more to be done; and he casts round towards Pickwell to learn that the leading hounds have slipped on, and that he, and we, are merely with the tail. Captain Brocklehurst has caught a glimpse of them as they disappeared forward; and now, instead, of pursuing the fox, it is tracking the line of hounds. Not a horse can gallop; few can trot; and it becomes a laborious pilgrimage in the dark. To cut description short, they (*i.e.*, huntsman and field) struggled on, breaking through gaps, trotting over grass, working forward as the tail hounds showed a line, or foot-people gave information, till they reached Pickwell village—to find eight couple of hounds wandering helplessly round. Mr. Duncan, on his road home, had met them, running breast high by themselves; and the villagers said they had been there five minutes. And this to my mind epitomises the excellence of this grand run. Hounds had gone—without a check and at extraordinary speed—for *forty minutes!*—and when can you remember the like?

Neal cast round the village; and tired horses fell at small broken fences. Most of the field went home; but a few remained to do their duty by huntsman and master. Hounds were brought back to the village, and every nook was searched. There was a feather in the churchyard, a whimper in the parson's garden. *Yo' oi over there, old bitch!* From an ivy-covered wall drops the monster, his great brush hanging, and his ponderous head drooping low. He darts through a farmyard under horses' very heels. “Tally ho! Tally ho! Fifty pounds

to kill him!" Hounds are on him in a trice—one more difficulty as he runs the Somerby Park; then up the gully beyond—and they nail him fifty yards from the Punchbowl! As big as a wolf, as strong as a tiger. The pace beat him. Did you ever see so fine a fox? Did you ever ride a more glorious gallop, since that from Ranksboro' in '77? We have a finish now. We wanted it then. Perhaps we went a more perfect line in that famous run. But—if I may venture odious comparison—the Ranksboro' Run was all a better country; and there was no fog to blind one to leading hounds. The pace was equal on either occasion.

I have told the run roughly—probably imperfectly—but, as I saw it, from a side line. In my humble judgment, there were, in the fastest part, but three men in it, as men should see a run—if you will accept the definition that "to see a run" means that you are in each field before hounds leave it, and that you only ride a run when you ride to the sight of hounds throughout. We are often content to do less, and we dislike judging ourselves by so strict a test. In this instance the men most prominent eventually were served by an early turn; they had a bad start; they quickly got to the front; and to their credit they made their mark right honourably.

THE MASONS OF MELTON.

A FORTNIGHT of almost unexampled sport found its end in the snowstorms which set in on Saturday, February 22nd. Day after day there had been a good run—on many days a *great* run. And, if hard riding be any test, men never showed themselves more appreciative. For months there had been none of the routine of six days a week. Of the *ennui* of overtaxed strength they knew nothing. They had forgotten that such a thing as fatigue could exist; and to a fall they attached no more terror than to the bugbear stories of childhood. So they rode with surpassing vigour and dash; and if misfortune

came freely and frequently, it had little effect on the survivors. I never think it my part to chronicle accidents—but, whether from the depth of the ground, from frost-fattened horses, or from both, falls have been very numerous and not always harmless.

The Quorn set no light value on their run of Friday last (February 22nd). Of late it has been more or less a reproach on the Quorn foxes that they have run short and turned too quickly. The smallness of their coverts and the length of the late frost might fairly have led to results justifying such an accusation. But no stone of this kind could be cast at them to-day ; for in *an hour and thirty-five minutes* hounds were taken over fully thirteen miles of country, while a bee line from the point of find to that of finish could not be less than eight.

Mr. Coupland gave the world till 11.30 to reach Great Dalby ; but even this was scarcely indulgence enough for such as would dance by night and hunt by day. The Masons of Leicestershire held their ball at Melton on Thursday night. To belong to the brotherhood of the hunting-field was held to be quite sufficient title to a share in the freemasonry of the evening ; Melton and its neighbourhood trooped in, and, in white apron or pink coat, made merry till morning. Following this up, it was believed, in some quarters, that the meet would be postponed till twelve o'clock—in spite of advertisement as usual. And those who were fortunate enough to act upon the impression, lost their sport.

The moment Firr spoke in Gartree Hill hounds opened too, and immediately the thick thorn covert was alive with foxes. Backwards and forwards they bounded over the broad rides. One and two slipped away. Then one with ragged fur was seen ; and to "kill the mangey one" became the object. Again and again he was hemmed into a corner ; but if he had the misfortune to be bald, he was certainly no invalid, for with astonishing activity he darted each time through the midst of the ravening pack. At last, after a moment's silence, came the signal of the fox gone—in all probability our hairless friend—

and Firr hurried out to set hounds on his track. Away through the long plantation below Little Dalby—a Friday field, and two little handgates. Then round Burdett's Covert, up Burrough Hill—much holloaing, and hounds never fairly settled. The ascent was breasted ; and at once it was necessary to descend again. Quickly hounds bore up once more into the Punchbowl ; and this was the moment when you either sickened of climbing or went vigorously on to take part in an excellent sporting run. The past ten or fifteen minutes ought really to be wiped out of the computation of time-takers ; for from Gartree Hill to the Punchbowl is scarcely more than a stone's throw. Over the steep pitches and gullies to Somerby Village hounds bustled merrily on, with a brace of foxes before them ; and then they were laid on again beyond the village—with the cream of old Leicestershire before them and the flower of young Leicestershire in their wake. Over the good wild grass to Owston village they ran, all of themselves and sometimes by themselves—for the big fences and intersecting bottoms gave them all the room they wanted. An honest stretching oxer bordered the first field ; a single attempt was made at it ; and a single horse went on riderless—while a gate opened the way to all who followed immediately after hounds. By the way, how wild and eccentric is, usually, the career of a riderless horse—even of an old hunter ! The animal now taking his own part with hounds soon struck off at right angles to his proper course, in order to clamber and crash through another compound bullock fence, in order to reach a deep wet bog beyond ! In the same way, with the Belvoir on the day immediately following, a horse without its rider galloped straight into an open pond—as if attacked by gadflies.

Three broad gateways carried on the van and the body of the field, till presently hounds bore leftwards across a bottom whose width could only be determined by experiment, its nearer bank having a dark thorn fence to screen it. Mr. Brocklehurst and Mr. Herbert Flower were first to make the trial, each dropping only a hindleg. The three next comers

put a worse aspect on the venture, for they rolled in a row—the wag of the party executing his tumble with all the activity and *insouiance* of “The Comic Skater” of the Aquarium. There was a pleasant easy place handy, where you and I, reader, could save ourselves from undue danger—nor yet lose sight of hounds. And again, there was a ford and gate to render the humble brook below Owston village still more suitable to men of our time of life. By the village side, a sheepdog for once did us a *good* turn, for he drove our fox away from Owston Wood, and bade him take his chance over the lovely hills and dales that stretch away to Twyford. And over this beautiful ground the chase sped happily, at a fast hunting pace. Everyone could be near hounds, and a large field pursued its way delightedly. The new railway for a moment checked them all—excepting Lord Manners and one follower, who rattled the big rails in, and found an easy place out of, the line. The rest then galloped a field round to pass under the viaduct. By the village of Twyford the brook runs not wide but bare—nothing for a willing horse at a trot, but not encouraging to the shifty, nor enticing to one that is sticky. Twenty men left it behind them at once, nor turned in their saddles to learn that in it they had left *something more*, or one and all must have hurried back to help. The dear butcher was overhead in the brook! THE butcher of Melton—the butcher who is always helping the fallen, the butcher who is the ready slave of any lady in difficulty, the butcher who carves wide holes for us in the thickest bullfinches, the butcher in blue who, with sixteen stone above the saddle and seven pounds ten shillings under it, has ridden for three seasons with the lightest and the richest! The butcher is as hard and keen as his cleaver: the mare is a marvel. The butcher had made up his mind to be forward; the mare meant the same. But the chasm of the brook came before her unawares: her courage failed her; in sudden fear she planted her feet, and bent her neck in shame—and, alas, the butcher *went on!* Don’t laugh, please, reader. *I did not—or only as little as I could.* But

for many a day I shall think of that honest form, as in its clinging robe of blue it clambered back up the bank, like a bathing-woman after her task is done.

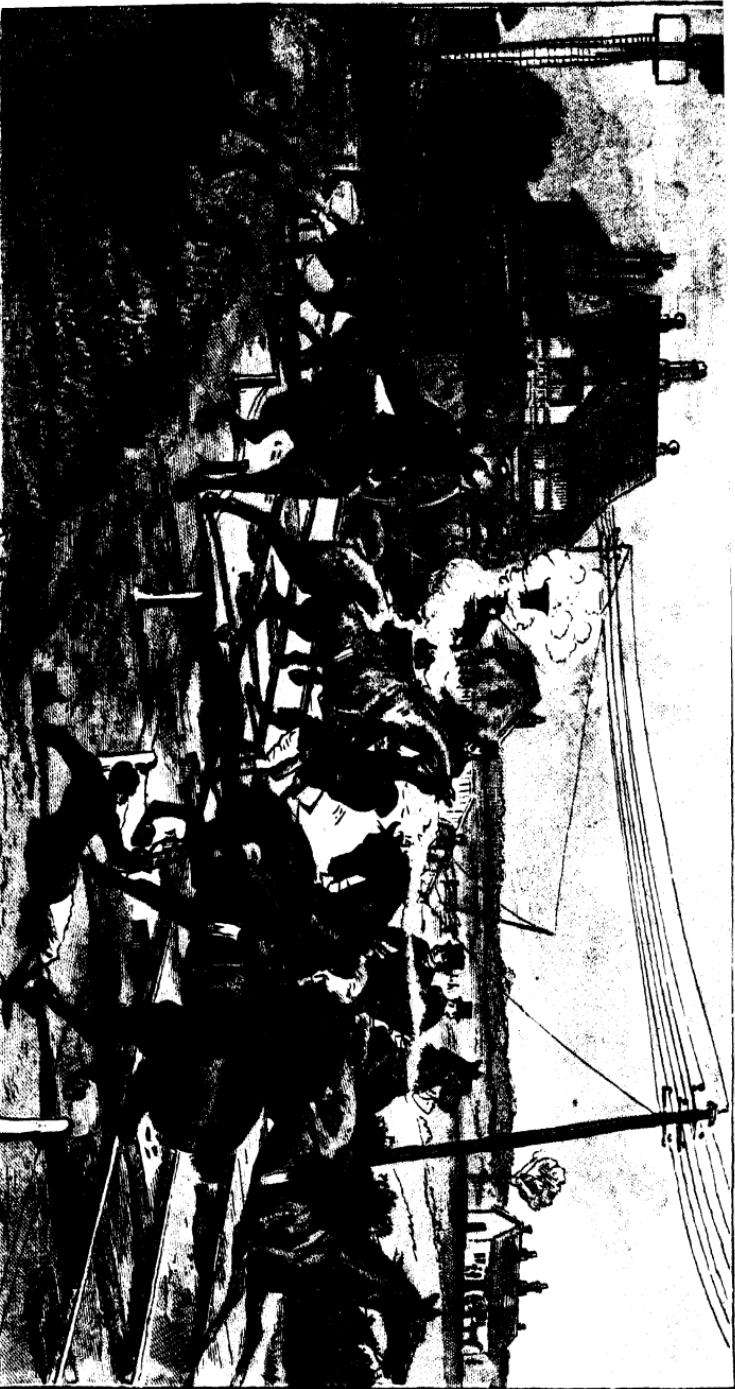
From Twyford to Lowesby is no great distance. In the park hounds were only just saved from pursuit of a fresh fox, and onwards still the chase proceeded. Baggrave was left just on the right; so was Hungerton; and the course continued between Keyham and Quenby Hall. No prettier hunting, no more quiet skilful handling was seen in the run than took place under Quenby Hall. By the time Mr. Carver's spinney was reached, horses were galloping slowly and jumping rather feebly. But the end was close at hand. With Scraptoft Holt but a few fields on the right front, Firr caught a view of his sinking foe, helped his hounds over a single plough, and in another minute had him in hand. *A thoroughly fine sporting run, a good point, and a rare line of country,* best conveys the general verdict on the morning's sport. From Gartree Hill to Owston Village is a straight four miles and a half. From Owston Village to where the death took place is another seven—and to have covered this distance in an hour and thirty-five minutes conveys a notion of no mean pace.



A RIDE ON THE RAILWAY.—Crown point on Thursday, March 20th, furnished an episode fortunately uncommon.

The Gunby Gorse fox escaped easily on a weak scent ; but the Pochin family knew of another lying handy to supply the loss. So from the neighbourhood of Edmondthorpe hounds got away, not only in view, but almost on his back, and for some few minutes could not help but race him (Messrs. Jacobson, Custance, Coupland, and Firr—master and huntsman being on a holiday trip—cutting out the work with Neal). Reaching the Midland railway, he turned to run the water meadows parallel with the line to Saxby Station.

Reaching the level crossing between Whissendine and Ashwell Stations almost the whole field (in spite of the warning from the woman at the gate-house that the 1.23 train from Melton was overdue) gaily took to the line of rail, to ride nearly two miles to Whissendine Station—as if no such thing as a locomotive were in existence. As they neared the station, they first heard, then saw, the overdue train speeding to meet them. At the platform, however, it pulled up, that horsemen might get off the embankment. But to pass a puffing, snorting engine blowing off steam, and the vapour driven by a stiff breeze into the face of one's horse, is easier ordered than done, and a regular panic ensued. Horses plunged and shied, and the signal wires caught some of them as in a trap. In this way Mr. Hassall was thrown down and kicked on the leg—his horse getting loose. Mr. Younger also was struggling on the ground to hold his horse. Captain Stirling's priceless chestnut "Brilliant Rascal" became quite unmanageable, broke loose, and after running some 100 yards down the line, turned back and was charged by the train, but was caught unhurt. Mr. George Finch and his horse rolled together down the embankment without injury to either ; the horse bolted down the line towards Whissendine, and was caught at the level crossing, nearly two miles off—his master following in the guard's van and mounting his captured steed as soon as the train could come up with it. In the meantime



A regular panic ensued; horses plunged and shied; and the signal wires caught some of them as in a trap.

To face page 283.

Mr. Henry Finch and his mare were charged by someone whose own horse was out of control, were knocked head over heels down the embankment, through the hedge, and into the water meadow beneath. Luckily, and wonderfully, no damage was done to anyone; and it was most amusing to hear, first the expostulations, and then the objurgations, of sundry passengers, who were sadly put out at the delay, fearing they would thus miss the branch train at Peterborough. It happened, too, that Lady Castlereagh was a passenger in the train and a spectator of the *mélée*.

While all this was going on, the pursuit had taken a ring into the Belvoir country, returning by Wymondham into Stapleford Park; thence back by Wymondham Roughs—slow hunting all the way. Hounds, however, got up to their fox as he struggled on toward Whissendine, and pulled him down in a small spinney by the riverside. With so poor a scent Neal was fortunate and deserving of all praise that he could give his hounds the fox they had so well earned.

The Cottesmore were at Beaumont Chase, 8th March, Saturday. They who met them brought back little to tell beyond the scene of a single fence. (Under Wardley Wood, if I remember right.) A small, deceptive hedge tempted the field to jump it in a line. The ditch beyond was altogether out of proportion; and some *five-and-twenty* men fell in a row—two of them being left standing with their bridles in their hands.

DEATH OF THE DOCTOR.—Two events I have to notice. One is of gladness and congratulation, viz., the appearance once more of Lord Wilton; who, though rather crippled in his riding hand, has taken the field with all his old enjoyment. The other, in a minor but scarcely less general degree, is of regret. The *Doctor* is dead! The Doctor had grown to be an institution in Leicestershire. Not only did we all know the old horse; but we have shivered in our tops again and again, when called upon to follow him over high timber or wide bottom. A varied but not unhappy career has been the Doctor's—

made, rather than marred, by an idiosyncrasy of temper, which first ousted him from promised success on the turf, afterwards induced him to decline the honours of steeple-chasing, and so fated him to be handed over to Custance for the remainder of his days. With a soul superior to the vicious influences of the flat and the flags, he was a gentleman, a giant in the hunting-field. There he was at home. The fences were seldom big enough; the pace was never severe enough for him. He shone chiefly some five years ago. Then it was that only the uninitiated or unwary ever thought of following the Doctor. To lie in his wake, with hounds running over a strong country, was destruction almost certain; for what the Doctor left in his stride was often an impracticable place to other horses. During the present season he seemed to have taken a new lease of life; and was apparently young as ever when on Saturday he broke his shoulder by jumping on to a cut tree root. We do not see many like him. And, for my part, I would rather ride than follow his equal.

QUICK MARCH.—To pick up a fox in a clean forty minutes is always an event! To run another to ground sharp and quick in another thirty-five makes a day—and, remember, 'twas the 21st of March! This is the month when we realise what we are losing, what we could enjoy, what fox-hunting *might* be. The poem is read, but the poetry lingers. In fitful strains the music comes back to set us aglow; and bright as airs of Offenbach are the snatches still retained. Solid constant sport may have left us; but there comes many a bright flicker to keep the light from departing altogether out of mind. Come back with me to the swampy gateway below The Prince's Covert at Baggrave. You are rather up wind of hounds. But you can't help that; for you are under orders just and imperative, that the covert shall be kept clear and that this sharp keen morning shall not be wasted. For the weathercock points northward; a few scant drops have caught the grass—sufficient to dull your boots as you changed from

hack to hunter—and there is a business feeling in the air that is altogether apart from the heavy slackness of a primrose morning. With a plethora of foxes at Baggrave we have often dwelt long before settling to a run. Who then will now believe that a galloping whip means anything but a skirting hound driven back into covert—the pack scarcely in the gorse? Tongues are wagging; stories are half told; steeds are champing; and you sit at ease. But one, here and there, is restless—with ear cocked, and eye that strays from anecdote and chaff. By Jupiter, they're away! “Behind there's the master's faint chiding, as vain as the Norseman's reproof to the sea.” They're gone; and you must go—and push over the sticky meadow, and its short deep ridges, as fast as a short back and lengthy shoulders can be driven. A single blast of the horn strays up the wind. “They may be a mile away already; and I'm a miserable man!” A second rough meadow. Hold his head tight, and let him have the rowels! Here come the pack swinging across you. You are more in luck now, than they who, like you, were penned at the other far corner. For on the right you have galloped one side of the square. They have a wide angle to turn. And now you may cling as close to Firr's coat tails as you can. His scream will live in your dreams to-night—as he takes the horn from his lips to cheer the stragglers to the head. You lift the old horse (or the young one) off his head as he tips the timber and drops into a deep furrow. With both heels in you send him up hill, as huntsman and Master (for the Master is there now) scarcely leave daylight in a high-grown bullfinch; and you sit back to steady him where they have flown a wide place in the bottom, prefaced by honest ash rails. Hunting isn't dead yet. What a pace the little ladies go! How long can it last? For the turf is all but dry—and now they strike a fallow. The glitter is gone; but there is plenty still to enjoy; and your blood need not drop to zero yet. The Beeby brook is crossed—a small place here, but an awkward creep, with a Leicestershire horse lately roused, and yourself in a hurry. Ah, a

plough is at work over the next hedge; and bold Reynard hates the implement as heartily as you do. It has turned him in his track, only half a field; and most of that is saved by the help of the ploughman. Steadily, not swiftly, they carry it on over the brow to the Keyham and Hungerton brook. Busily they take it across of themselves; and quicker now they speed those low level meadows that foxes have, this season, so frequently favoured. Every fence is a delight when horses bound, as now, off the surface. It is no labour to them to jump or to gallop to-day; for even the weakening sun is hid behind a cool grey curtain. And hounds run better, more vigorously, than they have done for a week or more. They want no help as they pass Humberstone Spinney; and bear upwards for the village of Barkby Thorpe. There he goes, not a field in front! Keep quiet, and let them bring it on! But they hang on the dry arable. Firr takes them in hand on the second, drops them on to his brush, and the rest is the old glad scene of baying hounds, delighted huntsmen, screaming whips, smoking horses and beaming faces. A trifle short of *forty minutes*, as we glanced at the watch in that first deep meadow, and remembered again the duties of timekeeper as Firr's *who-whoop* called in his followers.

How hounds could run to-day was proved again with the fox from the Laurels at Scrauptoft. He never went straight; but they always ran fast. And they twisted and turned with him over every field in a half-mile western semicircle round Scrauptoft Hall, till in thirty-five minutes they pulled up at a drain between that place and Barkby. "A jolly day's sport for March," came the verdict from every tongue—heartily and gratefully.

A BAGGRAVE FINALE.

April 10th, half a gale from the nor'-east, with cold, driving rain, but the glass rising and the turf full of mois-

ture. A morning as uncomfortable as weather could make it; but for all that it was stormy, for all that it was in itself chilly and cheerless, there was nothing in it to shoulder out the sportsman's hopes and interests. On the contrary, it was a *possible* morning, and with as little of the languor and dusty debility of a model spring day, as if dark December were back in surly earnest. No, scent was *likely*; a fox a certainty; a *good* one a probability; and—and all turned out trumps.

The Colonel was down, and hall and dining-room were crowded with dripping shivering forms; while hacks stood steaming outside, and hunters with staring coats, drooping ears, and tail tucked close awaited their masters' exit.

Full of worthy importance, Mr. Muggleton (Chief of the Staff to the owner of the Prince of Wales' Gorse, and *facile princeps* among fox keepers) lounged by the hounds on the lawn—awaiting the signal as eagerly as they. “Hope you'll find him at home, sir! Never been without him yet!” No, Muggleton, we'll lose all faith in keepers if we don't! And now to the Gorse—the Master just in time to prevent its complete encirclement, and Firr's voice raising its testimony to Muggleton almost on the moment.

[A parenthesis here for the benefit of gorse-growers. Young gorse has been lately planted over any little bare patches in the covert; and experiment shows that the plants thrive better where the grass and weeds have been left round them than where the ground has been kept rigidly clean.]

A big dog fox breaking right across the open, and running the gauntlet of the gazing squadrons, straight for the Hall. Carriages to block his path, and folk to shout in his face. Of course he can not go there; but his bold dash has given him his start, and eventually gives him his life. Wheeling off towards Beeby, he again puts his head straight; while conflicting evidence is hindering Firr from an instant dash in pursuit. The delay, though, is only of seconds, and the moment hounds touch the line a run is secure. Not room

for too many where they have glanced through the corner rails. You are lucky if you are early in the hovering throng, all so madly eager for a chance. If you let twenty before you now you are twenty behind, and will ride half unsighted through the coming burst. For good and fair as is the country here, the fences offer only a certain number of openings ; and even twenty men cannot ride abreast, with hounds running as they will to-day.

And to think that, with a meet at twelve—a meet at Baggrave—nay, more, the last meet of the Quorn on the grass—nearly half of Melton should have been *late* ! So late, indeed, that even the half hour of grace and hospitality was of no avail—to save them from gnashing of teeth as they trotted on far in the wake, from sackcloth that evening, or from ashes for a month to come. Alas ! alas ! As one who has made every possible experiment in delay, and is appreciative in the fullest degree of the luxury of dilatoriness, I pronounce most emphatically, yet with all sympathy, that to lose a run by late arrival at the covert-side is one marked exception to a too fascinating principle. It constitutes only a bitter unredeemable disappointment—and is an expensive treat withal. No ; poor and humble as is your servant, he holds few luxuries to be so extravagant as missing a good run with a good horse.

The lovely undulating Beeby country stretches in front ; and the pack sweep into it with a life and dash that challenge pursuit, defy overriding, and at once proclaim a run. Firr settles gladly down with them ; Captain Candy takes up the running in the manner that he has made his own—and so pre-eminently his own—this season. (For in every run I have been fortunate enough to see, and in many of which I have been only told, has he taken a leading part. And for the frequent use made of his name I can only urge that as a public chronicler I have had no choice.) Mr. Coupland, too, does not forget that Master and Leader are almost synonymous terms ; Mr. Pennington is galloping fast in front ; Mr. F. Gosling is right up, the Colonel is close at hand, and Custance is making

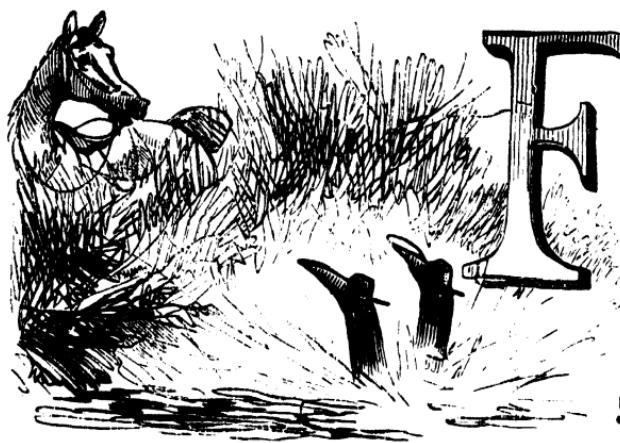
full use of the three stone advantage he can claim over most of us.

It is the “big” pack before us to-day—little of their extra music as they lay themselves down to the keen scent. The leading horsemen are going their best; but there is no race for places; for after the first four fences there is a locked gate (an only exit), then a second delay at a most unexpected wire. Again the van is huddled for a moment where a chain encircles a gatepost. For *every* fence is not plain sailing; and the last stride only tells if a gate has deceived. Some one must jump off, of course. Who is it to be? At such times, I notice, we are most of us more eager to proffer suggestion than to take the matter into our own hands. “Some one hold my horse?” is more often uttered with only a half-hearted desire that the request should be complied with. Rather it is often thrown out in hopes of shaming some other one to undertake the office apparently volunteered. For, in spite of “Wait for him! Let him mount! &c., &c.” the hapless labourer reaps less advantage from his praiseworthy task than any of his friends. The throng possibly makes a strong restraining effort to give him time to regain the saddle; but is only too often broken through from behind, and the good Christian is carried along stirrupless, blown, and scantily thanked. In the present instance the volunteer is ready, willing, but unskilled. Dismounting in a jiffey, he has the chain off, and the gate unlatched immediately. Firr is sent forward *ex officio*. The others pull up to await their friend in need. But he has not yet graduated thoroughly in the school of foxhunting; and the occasion is one of bewildering hurry. After two ineffectual dives at his stirrup, he calls all his youth and activity to his help, flings himself, waistcoat pockets downwards (to put it nicely) on to his saddle, and does his utmost to struggle into the perpendicular. His steed of course sets off again with the others; and the sequel scarcely needs recital. A dark clad form rebounds on the turf halfway up the field. Still less is it necessary to add that he who would help others is not left altogether friendless in his misfortune.

Ah, 'tis a sweet country and sweet fun as hounds run thus to Keyham, and past the right of that village straight for Scraughton Hall (twenty minutes). With the laurels so directly in front, and the Gorse just on the left, most of the pursuing crowd bear in that direction. Hounds, with a not uncommon perversity, bend the other way—and hence, as they sweep down the valley towards Humberstone village there are only four or five riders in immediate attendance. A dozen feet from bank to bank, the farther one strongly hedged, is no easy jump for a little horse, and had best not be attempted at all by a cowardly one. Custance's small mare rockets over without touching a twig; Mr. Marshall does it in-and-out; Captain O'Neal and Mr. G. Paget are successful too; while Mr. Beaumont jumps in—and hauls out. The pace is scarcely so quick now—indeed, up to Scraughton will be reckoned the fastest part of the run—but after the brook (that watering the Humberstone-and-Scraughton valley) is passed, the hunt closes up once more, and Evington is reached—a point of five-and-a-half miles in thirty minutes. By Stoughton and Oadby they ran and hunted fast; and should have had their fox. But a probable change was spoken of near the former village. At any rate, with a left turn they arrived Glen Gorse after almost exactly *one hour*, of such a chase as few foxes could have withstood. The line had passed within a few yards of the covert; and owing, no doubt, to the advisability of making the covert "safe" on every side, a long delay was succeeded by little further result. Their fox was tracked nearly to Wistow, and was then given up. But it had been a fine run, with a point of more than eight miles and over an excellent country. Almost every resident and visitor in the land between Melton and Market Harborough was there to assist in this winding-up feat of the Quorn; and divers strangers had come from far. There was a strong party from Rugby; and I should not omit to mention that Miss Davy rode forward as well as anyone in the gallop.

SEASON 1879-80.

FIRST CHAPTER OF ACCIDENTS.



RIDAY,
October
31, was
with the
Quorn,
the last
day of
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performance in public; and took place at Cossington. The afternoon was quite up to ordinary November sample. The morning was merely thus— Two old foxes at Cossington Gorse; and afterwards two cubs killed out of the many at Thrussington Wolds. The palates of the pack having been thus duly whetted, they went to Walton Thorns to seek a run—and found it. An old fox left westward, and over a rough and varied country beyond Seagrave gave them three-quarters of an hour good hunting, to bring them round to Cossington Gorse. Pushed out from there, he beat them on the return journey. Stragglers and missing were all recovered by the way. There had been various disasters in the early part of the run; and hurrying sportsmen had scarcely vouchsafed as much sympathy as they might have done. But dismounted horsemen were now directed towards the parish in whose direction their steeds were last seen careering. Sym-

pathy was even carried so far as to point out to the toiling owner the very gate on which his five-year-old had suspended himself head downwards, after leaving all properly constituted authority in a previous ditch. Better than all, the identity was now discovered of one of Leicester's fair sons, who "lost to view" (bar a pair of well built butcher boots) was still "to memory dear"—and will be for some time to those whose sides still ache from the scene. How he ever got so far as to cover a wide fence without his horse, or could measure his distance so exactly as to touch neither earth nor blackthorn, but only muddy water and brambles as he flew head downwards, is beyond understanding. Perhaps the good steed, who for long stood leaning open-mouthed on the other side, might be able to explain. By the way, while on the subject of losses, "If A. B. C. will communicate with Mr. Tomlin, Billesdon Coplow, he may hear of something to his advantage." And to show that this advertisement is *bonâ fide*, it may be explained that these initials are neatly worked on a very desirable silk handkerchief, which some ten days ago was left by him in the right skirt of his coat, on a thornbush in the covert of Botany Bay. It is requested that A. B. C. will either send for his skirt or transmit the remaining one—considerations of delicacy and adornment alike rendering it desirable that the two should be found on the same wearer. As regards the handkerchief, there is no pressing hurry, as it will pay for its keep.

In the initial week of the season '79—'80 was weather of curious variety, and sport now and again.

On Friday, November 7th, the Quorn had a nice day's—if a hot day's—sport from Barkby Hall. It was not only "as balmy," but as bright as May; and after hounds had run fast for some twenty-and-odd minutes, men who had summered well and shunned the pigskin till November, looked as if they must explode—or get into the nearest pond. Horses, too, made the worst of it. They found themselves kicked along as unflinchingly as if it were Christmas time. Yet the hedges and their guarding ditches had nothing of a Christmas look.

Each fence was woolly and indistinct ; the sun dazzled and their masters gave neither mercy nor time for thought ; so they floundered and crashed ; put down their fore-legs where there was nothing to depend upon but vacuum and the certainty of a somersault ; and cared as little for their hind-legs as a free-thinker for consequences. The tale of casualties (*The Field* never publishes a mortuary list) was entirely quadrupedal. Four empty stalls are better than one empty chair. It is a miserable thing to hear the gun ordered ; but it is ten times worse to be told to ride for the doctor. And we are materialists now-a-days. Cremation finds as much favour as the coffin. Sanitary motives may bid us in good conscience to consign any aged relatives to the flames. The old horse goes to the boiler in the cause for which he lived. We give him a chance of repaying a small measure of his borrowing—muscle for music, strength for excitements. Better—far better—that Roman and Rosebud should for one day string their notes upon the sinews that sprang so often to their echo, than that a longlashed tyrant should cut a shilling a mile out of the poor derelict in years to come.

Friday's first fox was excellently found for the folk who make of a meet at Barkby a joyous holiday. Half an hour of a bright warm morning had they spent basking round the Hall. Then from the plantation at the very gates they realised the find of a fox, saw the rush of the scarlet torrent, and heard the full notes of hound and horn. Over the hill, past Barkby Thorpe, sped the chase. An open trench in the first field cost Captain Campbell his best horse. It escaped from him here ; and, jumping sideways into a road, broke its back. The Humberstone brook, with its high rising banks and its thorny fence on the landing side, had also its victims. But I will pursue the list of casualties no further. A paragraph in a daily has already given undue prominence to the accidents of the day. Anxious friends, startled by the ambiguity of that announcement, may rest satisfied that though some good steeds

were disabled and shot, neither fate befell any of the riders. Twenty minutes or so over the Barkby-and-Scraptoft country is always a treat. And it was to-day, in spite of a choking atmosphere and a broiling sun. Grass and good fences, and the Quorn ladies running fast—is not this what we dream of in winters abroad, in summers at home? And the same, at further length, marked the afternoon. The fox of the morning got to ground. Then there was an adjournment to Scraptoft; and from the Holt came the run. It began under the difficulties of a divided pack, and only established itself in earnest when Hungerton Foxholes was reached. By this time Firr had got his hounds together; and catching a view as his loitering fox again broke covert, clapped them on to his brush, and drove him straight across the country nearly to Brooksby—a good six-mile point. The line passed between Barkby Holt and Baggrave; and went on by Queniboro' Spinney to Gaddesby, beyond which a change of foxes came to spoil the finish. The pace throughout was fair, never very fast: but it was a right good hunting run. There was the best of ground for those to disport themselves who liked to ride the line of hounds. There were bridle roads and gateways for all who preferred a more sober course, and yet would take part in the run.

I never saw men hotter than they were this Friday. I have seldom seen as many fagged faces as on Saturday (November 8th). Many of our good sportsmen abjure the saddle heartily from April to November. Some of them have done no harder work, meantime, than is involved in lying full length on a snowy deck, to read a novel and await the arrival of another appetite. These come down, perhaps, to Kirby, and straightway launch forth into hunting six days a week, that, forsooth, they may enjoy themselves. Small wonder, then (especially if we consider the hot mornings and the chilly evenings frequent of late) that towards the end of a week, backs have been bent in an agony of stiffness, saddles have been as hot iron, and

that Sunday should be as eagerly looked for by the Meltonian as by the most fervid ritualistic maiden. Nor is it strange that one of the subjects under discussion this week, together with the Turkish Crisis and Lord Carington's speech upon Entailed Property, should have been the source from whence good diachylon can be procured—that of the Melton chemist's having been found inadequate to give the relief required and enable the patient to pursue his daily vocation in comfort.

The autumn hour of 4.30 on Wednesday, November 12th found the main street of Melton clattering to returning hoofs (we can hunt with less condition and make out the day with a single horse up to Christmas); and in the dusk was pointed out the closed shutter of the local tobacconist's shop. No one lay dead within; nor had the Meltonians, eager to put by a winter's consumption, emptied its contents so rapidly as to bring the worthy man's business to a sudden standstill. No, they have put his walls of cigar boxes, his fences of briar roots and white meerschaums, to quite a different purpose—they try their hacks over them! Dr. Johnson or Newton (it has been ascribed to both, and to others besides) tenderly took his lady love's finger and silently made it a baccy-stopper for his pipe, in place of uttering the expected proposal. The damsel could hardly have been more surprised at the cool act of appropriation than, under almost reversed conditions, was the proprietor of the tobacco store—when, on Wednesday morning, crash through the closed window came a Meltonian on his way to covert. The chandelier volleyed across the shop; pipes and cigars flew in every direction; but the horse was unhurt, and scarcely a curl of the rider's head was ruffled. No permission have I to disclose the perpetrator of this Curtian leap. Were there not Three who kept the bridge, in the brave days of old, and one who never turned his head until the timbers crashed behind him? They gave *him* corn land that was of public right, and they made a molten image in his honour. Should

not *our* hero, the leader of other dauntless Three, who bears the honoured name so bravely, at least have his corn bill paid for him and be given a statue in Melton market-place? Subscriptions will be received by Brooksby.

SNATCHED FROM THE FROST.

Monday, December 22, was the best day's sport the Quorn have had to date. After fifty minutes' quick hunting in the morning, they killed their fox handsomely in the open; while the afternoon was enriched with a screaming twenty minutes—to ground. All Sunday it had been freezing hard, till in the evening the wind swung round to the south-west, a misty rain came on, and the ground softened as if by magic. "A most unexpected pleasure" was it to wake to hunting this morning. And, taken thus by surprise, we arrived at the meet with scarcely customary punctuality. Hounds moved off well within the expected half-hour of law; and had not our friends the foot-folk delayed Reynard's start for a few minutes, most of us might have under-estimated that morning run. As it was, all but the *very* late arrivals took their turn at the first two fences, found that their horses could make use of their feet, and so thought no more about frost for the rest of the day. In a new fir plantation, on the hillside south of Old Dalby, there were a brace of foxes—active they must both have been, or they would have been chopped in covert; *bold*, one proved himself to be. Breaking through the encircling mob (for there were a hundred on foot to fifty on horseback), he led us down steep inclines and up rough ascents, along the edge of the Vale, till he topped the crest of Wartnaby Stonepits, and headed for the Saxelby grass. Often baffled in his course, he worked on to Wartnaby and Kettleby—the pace excellent so far (perhaps a quarter hour), and the field, bothered by the rugged nature of ground and obstacle, having all their work cut out to keep

on terms. The fences were mostly safe good jumping—but gaps were dangerous, and foot-path stiles were best avoided for any jump twice the size. Pace mended again before Clawson Thorns was reached by a grass-line; then slackened off after they had touched the covert and dipped into the Vale. With steady, pretty hunting they ran up to their sinking fox in an orchard at Clawson Village, bundled him out of this in view, and rolled him over a couple of fields beyond.

Ah, but the burst from Welby Fishponds had a life and sparkle about it that warmed all the frost out of our frozen veins, and drove the blood through every frame—till the shallowest cheek was red, and the dullest eye grew bright. It was only twenty minutes. But it was twenty minutes after a long frost and little sport—twenty minutes over a superb grass country—and a twenty minutes so fast that horses would all have sobbed to make it five-and-twenty. At Welby Fishponds they found, and at first seemed bound for the tight enclosures of Asfordby parish. But even in the quiet afternoon a shepherd dog was ready; and so the start was made the other way. A tiny plantation towards Cant's Thorns served their fox for a covered way as he left. But it was evident in a moment they could run—for the ladies spun over three fields of plough as merrily as over down. Then they launched on to the best of grass, put their heads for Saxelby, and sped along its beautiful vale as fast as they could chatter. The fences of this strong grazing land grow everywhere with all the power of blackthorn on rich soil—each hedgerow a dense bullfinch, with perhaps only one weak spot or a timbered gap in its length. I think I remember each jump, as I saw the leaders race for it, and saw the pack ever half a field ahead of them. I know I shall ride that gallop over again in my dreams to-night—and none the less vividly that I have sat down to jot its outline while it clings fresh with the mud on my coat. That black converging bullfinch seemed for a moment to have caught them all in its grasp;

but Firr, Captain Middleton, and Mr. G. Paget bored through its darkness on the left, while Mr. Cart, on the old grey mare of the Oakham jumping prize, popped over a high palisade in the very corner, and got the inside turn for a few fields. There was only one hole—and that a mere SMEUSE—in the next blackthorn wall; but Sir Beaumont Dixie ducked his head and plunged through it, with a certain loss of blood and hair, but with considerable advantage to his followers. Half a dozen timber and thorn variations brought the scurry over the Saxelby railway tunnel; and, three fields beyond hounds were over the gulf known as the Saxelby Bottom. An easy on-and-off made this amenable at the right point. Next came a choice between a slippery little stile, with the hedge meeting overhead, and with silly sheep crowding among your horses legs, and the two side fences, of plainer description if of more stalwart build. Rising the hill, Firr, Captain Middleton, and Mr. Beaumont had an unapproached lead, though a dozen more men were on terms, as for a moment the huntsman cut a corner with his pack—where a farmer had turned the fox half a field from his path. Yet there was not a second wasted, nor a second in which the music was not going. Another mile of hurried galloping, another mile of free fair fencing, and men stood hot and happy above Lord Aylesford's covert—two-and-twenty minutes from the find, exactly twenty (if I measured it right) from covert to covert. A few minutes later *who-whoop* sounded over an open earth. And now to dinner.

A PULL FROM THE PUNCHBOWL.

THE Cottesmore run of Saturday (January 3) may well form the pith of my story. *One hour and twenty minutes* from the Punchbowl, a seven-mile point, and a kill in the open—is the outline; and here are the particulars, as well as I can give them.

Saturday came in with a bright sunny morning, a keen but gentle breeze, and just a suspicion of hoar frost under the hedges. It was one of those mornings that told you hounds must run—and, however dazzling might be the sun, it could have no power in January to spoil sport. So, past hardships had no place in the thoughts of the hopeful multitude who met hounds at Leesthorpe. The following few names will give some inadequate idea of the Cottesmore field as it turned out on Saturday, and as it usually assembles this season on its more fashionable side. Completeness is not aimed at; and another day's list might show numberless names not now included. Let it stand that from the Barleythorpe and Oakham neighbourhood came Lord Carington, Lord Castlereagh, Mr. Hugh and Lady Grace Lowther, Mr. and Mrs. Cecil Chaplin, Capt. and Mrs. Candy, Mr. and Mrs. Clayton, Capt. R. Carington, Col. Gosling, Capts. Jacobson and Tryson, Messrs. Gosling, G. and H. Finch, G. Noel, Westley Richards, Wing, Orme, and S. Hunt. From Melton came Sir Beaumont and Lady Florence Dixie, Capt. and Mrs. G. Stirling, Mr. and Mrs. G. Paget, Mrs. Adair, Marquis of Queensberry, Lord James Douglas, Sir John Lister-Kaye, Col. Forester, Capts. Boyce, Middleton, Smith, Beaumont, Behrens, Messrs. Brocklehurst, Creyke, Harter, Hill Trevor, H. and L. Flower, Jones, B. Lubbock, Marshall, Parker, W. Younger, Capt. and Miss Hartop, from Dalby; and from various parts Lord Manners, Sir R. Sutton, Sir Bache Cunard, Col. Palmer, Capts. Barclay, Dawson, and Wallace, Messrs. Barclay, G. Cunard, A. Heathcote, Herbert Flower, Hungerford, Custance, Logan, Newton, Peake, Pennington, Verney, Wroughton, &c.

These, then, and twice as many more with them, moved down under the sunshine to see the Punchbowl drawn—meeting, perhaps, a sharp air that they had felt nothing of as they rode before it to covert. For descriptive purposes it will be enough to say that the Punchbowl is a warm dell in a rough chain of hills, on part of which the village of Burrough is perched, and on the summit of which the Romans left an en-

trenched camp that might still be held by a couple of regiments against ten impis of Zulus. Steep gradients run down into the lower country on all sides, save the Saddleback leading southwards to Somerby. Some three miles due east is Ranksboro' Hill, with a rough undulating country intervening. Beyond Ranksboro', again, is a wealth of deep undrained grass, varying from the level plain of the Vale of Catmose (better known in parts as the Burley Flat), to the higher ridges of Overton, Oakham Pasture, and Manton.

After the clamber to the rim of the Punchbowl, there was little interval before Goddard's shrill throat was trilling a higher, cheerier note than ever nightingale aspired to. But the first spasm of excitement led to nothing, for a shepherd proudly told how he had "run him back to covert." The demon, and the demon's dog, were posted exactly where Reynard would have made his point (for Somerby or for Ranksboro'). So it became necessary for the fluttered field to take up their post again ; and from their vantage spot to mark a big fox, with a mangey back, cross and recross the ride at their feet. But it was not for long. They were quickly called away —this time in a direction almost opposite to that of the run already prompted and soon to be executed. A good fox had to play the rôle of a bad one. He skirted the brow of the hills ; worked round, as well as continued interception would let him, by the Roman Camp and the onlook of the Melton Steeplechase Course, till after encountering many imaginary perils, and many visible enemies, he struck his proper line and crossed the gullies for Pickwell and the country beyond. Past Pickwell Hall—with crashing of timber that was far behind his ken—the Hunt bore on, and set forward in earnest. A mile further, and it settled honestly—heartily—at length desperately. I may dip for new ink at the moment when there were two distinct lines calling for attention—the one on plough and snatched up by a solitary couple ; the other fainter, though on grass and, to all appearance, certainly continuant. There was a vigour irresistible about the former. The pack were tallied on to the head, and

here was (in the opinion of many thorough judges) the beginning of a glorious end. From this point to the foot of Ranksboro' Hill was a deep two miles : and—with hills to climb, and plough and pace to meet—there had been already labour heavy and incessant. Horses in condition were stretching their girths, recent purchases were reduced to a sorry hang-dog trot, when there was a moment's pull at the Overton Fish-pond Spinney under Ranksboro'. Every sign and circumstance pointed to a beaten fox. Half an hour of such severity must have left as killing a mark on him as it had done on horses. And why, unless distressed, should he turn from his line at the base of a strong holding covert? So reasoned many other judges—and reasoning thus arrived at a conclusion anything but profitable. At this moment Neal's ear caught a halloa, and his eye, thrown forward to the sound, gave him a glimpse of a fugitive form stealing over the opposite brow. With only a word to his hounds he was through the little handgate of the gully in a moment—the steaming field squeezing their turn through as best they could. Over the sedgey, anthilly pastures beyond, most of them rode leisurely—knowing nothing of this fresh start, and confiding comfortably in the thought that hounds were safely dwelling in Ranksboro' Gorse. They had only to reach the eminence to be very clearly undeceived—Hounds were streaming away below, with a single horseman near them, and half a dozen more only just within hail. Mr. Baird had pierced the well-known Orton Park and Ranksboro' belt of trees with the pack, started off with them, and kept nearer to them for the rest of this great gallop than did anyone else. The turf was more than fetlock-deep ; the scent was ravishing ; and horses were already half beat. He could gain nothing on the hounds ; and with such a chance, a clever rider and a stout horse were not likely to be overhauled. He found his way through each bullfinch as it came ; and struck off the Orton-and-Oakham Bottom just where it could be jumped. Capt. Boyce and Mr. Gosling (*primus*) were nearest him as he rose the first hill in the bee-line to Oakham Pasture. The

former broke a stirrup-leather at a critical juncture ; and his place was taken by Neal, Capt. Smith, Capt. Middleton, Lord Carington, and Col. Gosling. Lord Castlereagh was near at hand ; and so was Lord Queensberry, with a fainting horse, Lord James Douglas, and Mr. Beaumont—though each of the four fences up the hill to Oakham Pasture brought the latter a fall apiece ! Mr. Clayton, too, formed one of the struggling front division ; in which Lady Florence Dixie and Mrs. G. Stirling were also to be numbered. Hounds were reached at Oakham Pasture, but held on beyond as far as the brook between there and Manton Gorse. The tremendous pace had crushed their fox. He turned leftwards by Martinsthorpe (the extreme point), crossed the railway, was hunted back towards Oakham Town, jumped up in view—a great fellow with back arched, brush dangling, and all his pride gone. Yet he made one hard struggle more, was run in view for several fields, gained two minutes' more life by doubling a hedgerow, then was made the centre object of a noisy, hot, delighted crowd who had met the returning chase and shared the finish. There was no mange about *his* back ; and, i'faith, three foxes—much more two—might have been run to death in that desperate chase. Twenty-five *really fast* minutes will, as all the world knows, break the heart of any single fox. This run was an hour and twenty minutes in all—and fully fifty of it had been extraordinarily fast. Yes, there had been pace, time, and distance enough to slay two fine foxes. *Where* the change came is merely a matter of theory and speculation. The map will show that the route between the extreme points of the Roman Camp of Borough Hill and Martinsthorpe was bow-shaped, in its curve by Ranksboro'. And now I have nothing more to add on the subject of this splendid run.

The following incident is published as a warning to such as would pursue the fox in Charnwood Forest, without providing themselves with trained guides or taking the ordinary precaution of mountaineers—of connecting the party by means of ropes when crossing the more dangerous heights. While the

Quorn hounds were out on Tuesday week, the hardy sportsmen who hunt in this wild region were called upon to traverse a rocky ledge overhanging the cottage of some native peasant. The party was led by a noble lord, who was under the impression that, as he was on his own property, *he* at least would be able to find his way in safety—when to their horror the ground on which his horse appeared to be treading so securely, suddenly gave way under him, and both disappeared entirely from view. In their terror and amazement the spectators made certain that horse and rider had dropped into some disused coal mine, and had given them up as utterly lost. But soon a grimy face reappeared from the chasm—and his lordship informed them that he was standing on his saddle). In another moment sturdy arms pulled him up to a place of safety—while the old woman of the cottage, grumbling loudly, unlocked the door of her cow-shed (through the roof of which this rude entry had been made), and led the horse out through the door.



SCRAPTOFT AND BARKBY.

LET the Quorn gallop of Friday last, Jan. 9, be my theme. The meet had been Baggrave Hall, and the morning in sequence to Colonel Burnaby's Annual Tenant Dinner. Why all the neighbouring world should consider the occasion eminently theirs, is a question not for me to solve. They all do, and Baggrave Hall on the Friday immediately consequent on the Colonel's Fête is a rendezvous for Leicester's million, and as many more besides.

The Prince of Wales' Gorse loosed off a leash of foxes for their morning's edification. Firr hunted one to death through the clouds of skirmishers that hovered over the Hungerton and Coplow districts. The morning's retrospect, indeed, contains little else than an over-strung pack, a flanking crowd of gallopers, a direct onslaught of over-riders, and a huntsman coolly working his best, with apparent disregard of mob and multitude. With everything in favour of the fox—a cold quiet morning and sundry loud-voiced idlers alone excepted—he was killed after a twisting career, as he reached Hungerton Fox-holes—found the said holes stopped two feet from the surface, and was pulled out by the leading hounds. The next chase.

was similar—a nice country, a nasty crowd, and fox accounted for—to ground. Then much of the rough element dispersed—not *all*, for it was vociferous indeed at Scraughtoft, though it appeared but little afterwards.

But my story begins only after the raw cold ride to Scraughtoft Gorse, whence the second, and the better, run of the present season was to date. Hounds were quickly busy, and a fox was quickly out—and in again. Let us pass over how he broke a second time, how his track was jumped on before a hound appeared upon it, or how the huntsman was allowed to blow his horn unhelped, while the pack flashed back on the heel line. “Hey Caliban ! Oh for a Master ! Oh for a Man !!” (for Mr. Coupland can still only take the saddle, and the reins of government for half a day). Over the Scraughtoft lane, through its plantation, and out into the open, the fox had gone—three hounds in his wake. It was a wild beginning to a consummate end. The huntsman, who alone seemed to keep his head, strove his utmost to throw the body of the pack forward to the head. Those three hounds might—and ought—to have been stopped at once. Now, with a sharp fling to the right in one pasture, and as sudden a twist to the left in the next, they baffled Firr’s effort to cut through his encircling, misinforming, crowd ; and with a tremendous scent went forward for Barkby. For a mile or two they defied approach ; and only on the farther bank of the Humberstone Brook dwelt long enough for their struggling comrades to reach them. A high post-and-rail stood in mid-stream ; and the huntsman’s good bay surrounded it with a clatter of wood and iron, and a splash of mud and water. Similar success brought his next two followers over. The third performed a feat as startling as I ever saw achieved by horseflesh. We of the more timid order, meantime, had popped over the stream at its narrowest, dismounted to break down the fence beyond, and were now safely making our way along the higher ground on the other side. Passing opposite the jump in question, the top rail of the timber was

alone visible above the level of the farther bank. Galloping hard into the gulf rode one, whose estimate of Leicestershire could only have been that which is shared by three-fourths of the outer world—viz., that it is purely and simply a “flying country.” The awakening to his error was a rude, and only by happy accident failed to be a terrible one. Above the level of the bank only the rider’s form was at that moment to be seen. The next instant the pair had so utterly reversed position, that only the horse’s four gyrating hoofs flashed above the intervening green-sward. A grinding splash was heard ; spray flew up into the air, and we rode back to pick up the corpse. But, though shaken and startled—not nearly so much frightened as lookers on—the sportsman was picking himself out of the shallows, preparing to go onwards—and, in future, to ride slow at stiff timber out of a hole.

But the pack were now together, the field were all handy, the fox had gained but little law, and a run was established. Under Barkby-Thorpe Spinney there was a quarter-minute’s hesitation ; afterwards scarcely a second’s, until the chase was over. Freeing themselves from the last of the three ploughed fields in their course, the pack hurried gaily on to Barkby-Thorpe Village, took a quick turn through some tiny plantation there, and flew the wall of Mr. Brooks’ Park. Their fox must have waited for them somewhere about this point ; for, well as they had been running already, they now stretched themselves nearer the ground than they could ever do before—and the next seventeen minutes constituted and defined a true Elysium. So far there had been time to talk, to speculate, and to trifle, as we went. Now it was an earnest prolonged effort to keep near hounds. They swept past the door of Barkby Hall, glanced across the Park, the narrow iron outlets from which were a sad hindrance to many, who had been enticed through the entrance gates. Captain Goodchild made his way out earliest. But hounds were already a field away, for Queniboro’, as the leading men ducked under a tree to gallop the bullfinch

rather than be checked by another gate. In the same way they slipped over the timber and little brook at the bottom, rose the hill and its dividing quickset in their stride; and still it was a matter of galloping a stern chase. Lovely grass the whole of it, small enclosures drained as they should be, and fences made up with due regard to a hunter's fair powers. The pack had now set their heads for Barkby Holt (Barkby gives its name to a wider sphere and to more scattered points than any three ordinary lordships); and keeping on one side of a boundary-hedge nearly all the way—while Firr and Captain Middleton rode the other side and took the cross fences in a line with them—they strained to the head as if running in view. Three fields from Barkby Holt the leading company consisted of the above, together with Captain Ashton, Messrs. Adair, Hill Trevor, L. Flower, Captain Candy, Lord Grey de Wilton, Sir Beaumont Dixie, H. Flower, Captain Wallace, and some few others. Lady Florence Dixie and Mrs. Gerald Paget were also riding up throughout the run—which went on, without slackening a moment, through the Holt and out beyond. Beeby Village was left on the right as, with gasping horses, the small field rolled through the fences, and prayed that their sinking fox might soon be to hand. Hounds did it all themselves when the difficulty of a cold dirty lane came; quickened up again as they extricated themselves, and carried the chase over another mile of grass. A wide, impossible ravine stopped the way; one or two of the leaders had already slid down into its depth, and prepared to lead their jaded steeds up the opposite bank—when the Quorn ladies bayed forth the signal that the end had come. Their fox was to ground in a rabbit-hole. He had run *fifty-two minutes* before them, and, by map-measurement, over some eight miles of country in the time. For their reward, and as a counter to local poultry-claims, he was doomed—and dug. With the single exception of the abstract virtue, *point*, this fine gallop had every good quality—pace, distance, country, and company; and the run was alto-

easily enough ; but neither eloquence, nor barrack-square exercise, availed to pull it on again—gaily and garrulously though he hopped about the bank. He is ever a friend to others in misfortune, and only yesterday was hauling a pinned friend out of a ditch by the expedient of loosing him out of his boots. It is very impertinent, it is wholly unwarrantable, to laugh at a friend in distress—but it was horribly funny to meet the smart footguardsman travelling home that evening attired something like a deserter from the blues. In place of the faultless get-up of the morning, he had white roomy cords, high Blucher boots, a blue cutaway, and—in place of hat or helmet—a billycock of some service. But he was warm and dry ; and his friends, thanks to that friendly farmer, will soon see him to the fore again. Ah, in the flutter and fun of this happy run there was many a wayside episode for laughter and frolic—were there now time, and were it allowable, to recall it.

Will confidence, elegance, nothing avail,
When the black stops short at a post-and-rail ?
Or, supposing you're teaching a sticky horse,
Is it fair to find fault with cannon or cross ?

These queries are not meant for poetry, scarcely for rhyme ; but they contain a moral ; and they come in at a check (after some twenty-five minutes), just as our fox has crept into Coston Village, and we go on with another (this point being supposition founded upon evidence). After Coston Village a long slow quiet hunt, in which second horses might be picked up at any time, by Wymondham and Edmondthorpe Villages up to Woodwell Head—Gillard picking his way forward to a very different scent to that of the earlier chase, and hounds steady as harriers on the plough. They had run palpably into the field bordering the covert, and were being held along its margin for the trail in—when Will's voice sounded shrill beyond, and they were laid on once more on terms worthy of the day. Pop your luncheon into your pocket, clap in the spurs, and ram

your old hat down as hard as its many crushers will allow ! Squeeze your way as rudely through that beastly handgate as you think an apology will cover. Down the slope for Market Overton, the grass field is already outspread with gallopers. Not a hound to be seen ; and men appear to be jumping wildly outwards—left and right and forward. Three or four red coats, and as many black, are glimmering, glancing, right ahead. These must be the guiding stars. Men never ride as fast as that unless they have got a start above their fellows.

Timber is the fence-work of the Market Overton Vale. Often it is light and airy ; but, by all that is holy, they have been putting new rails down everywhere to prepare for to-day. The leaders, too, must be possessed with a sudden, insatiable fury. They seem to look upon everything wooden as a challenge. Not a gate is swung ; but two are jumped in immediate succession—and these are Leicestershire gates in verity and strength. In five minutes there must have been full fifteen timbered jumps—hounds lancing forward all the while to a scent extraordinary. At such moments 'tis impossible to do more than struggle your own afterway, giving little notice to others—unless it is to the good pilot on the chesnut, setting example for the young one in his wake, fence after fence (for horses are as imitative as, and much less craven than, their masters). Messrs. Hugh Lowther, G. Drummond, Mr. Rhodes, and Lord Esme Gordon, are, with Captain Smith, taking the timber rapidly, and cut the lane cleverly by means of a stile in and a stile out. Quickest after them, I must be allowed to mention Mrs. Candy, gallantly carried and gallantly riding. In and out of a roadside garden, on to the grass flat through which runs the Oakham Canal. Tally ho ! he crosses the big open pasture right across the horsemen ; while they pull up to breathe, and the pack, catching up every yard of his line, race on, and race back, to sweep the meadow with a front fifty yards broad. This is a scenting—this is a heavenly day. Fallow nor stubble, footpath nor fence, can hinder or thwart their gay noisy course. The

Belvoir mean blood to-day. Teigh Village is on the hill, they rise to it and leave it on the right. Twenty men jump into its lane abreast; a black hedge has to be pierced beyond. "Thank you, sir, you'll give us a lead." Yes, but "the Dodger" won't; and it remains for the martingale grey to break the binders. Now we are sweeping down hill—fences laid easy, horses stretched freely, the pack a clear field in front. Water forrard again! Oh, my hydrophobic soul! The Ashwell Brook—and the very spot last animated by a swimming grey mare!* Get to the front, water-jumpers—and delude us over in your stride! Ah, happiness! Hounds swerve on the very brink, and clatter on to the right, as if glad as *we* are to be clear of the shining, yet miry, stream. Coursing along its banks, they fly forward till a field-bridge spans the difficulty; and then they rush their fox over the railway—midway between the stations of Ashwell and Whissendine, where on the map you will find the word *Lodge* written. I can convey no fair idea of the scent that prevailed to-day. Hounds could follow and turn *anywhere*, at best pace and never hesitating. They doubled a hedgerow with their fox, pushed hard as ever over a fallow to the railway; and were beyond it long before they could be reached by the crossing. Mr. Brocklehurst cheered them on to the railway, then had two hundred yards to work round after them. By the time he had bored the road bullfinch, they were four hundred yards ahead. Boggy, deep, and awful were the next four fields. Horses, fairly fresh yet, had their lungs choked at once. The first fence was crashed through in two points—the Dodger (the *nom de plume* is the horse's) breaking his way through on the right, Mr. Gerald Paget following,—the welter regaining ground after a lengthy struggle and gaining more still by at once striking his line to the right for firmer soil. Another faint scramble, with a sinking feeling between the knees—the pack in the sky-line, and one's hopes of further progress rapidly reaching the same eminence. Then

* A recent luckless experience of the Author's.

the beaten effort of a good horse to surmount one more high-timbered ditch—a dig of the heel, such as one hates to use except on an unwilling evil slug—next the wide vista of an uphill broken plough, speckled bodies rolling over each other at the far corner. Who-whoop ! who-whoop !! Mr. Brocklehurst takes the treasured remains from their mouths. Mr. Graham shoots up on the grey, fresher than any other man or horse. Captain Byng had also ridden right up to hounds throughout. Of the others, I have alluded to all that seemed, or were said to be, most prominent. Thirty minutes was the final burst from Woodwell Head. They had run altogether one hour and forty minutes. It has been written—

Is there aught worth losing or keeping ?
The bitters or sweets men quaff ?
The sowing or the doubtful reaping ?
The harvest of grain or chaff ?

But then the poor fellow who wrote this was a *foxhunter*—and wrote it in a land which owned not a pack of hounds.

A NOTE.—Sir Bache Cunard's bobtail fox of the Market Harboro' Ball day was brought to light next morning from under the railway—by the kennel boy going five-and-twenty yards to ground, with a dark lantern, and a rope to his legs ! He found the brickwork of the culvert had fallen in ; but, with the help of a second terrier, he dragged the body of the fox out. The first terrier, put in on the day in question, is supposed to have been drowned after killing the fox, as he was not in the drain alive the next day. It should be mentioned, too, that so keen were the establishment to get the fox, that the whip had sat up at the drain all the intervening night.

RAIN AND SPORT.

THE soil a sponge, and every stream swelling far over its banks. On Saturday, Feb. 14th, the Cottesmore meet was

Wild's Lodge—some two miles from Melton, whose denizens might well congratulate themselves that they had to travel no further against the driving wind and ceaseless rain. Indeed, a morning to all appearance less favourable to foxhunting could not be conceived. The glass was falling as rapidly and steadily as the rain itself; sky and air were pregnant with storm; and the prospects of sport were apparently hopeless. Witness the result, and pay no further heed to weather or the chapter of probabilities, where foxhunting is concerned; but go out whenever you have a horse; and let frost, or funds, alone have a voice in dissuading you. It may be that that tyrant Frost is now making us reparation for the hardships we have suffered at his hands; and that the wondrous scent to which, day after day and amid all other vagaries of weather, we are now treated, may in the main be owing to his cleansing, purifying effect. On Saturday the Cottesmore ran hard *all day*; and their foxes cared as little for the direction of the wind, as hounds cared for its presence. They began with a desperate forty minutes from the Punchbowl, which ended by the body of the pack getting on to a brace of fresh foxes, who turned down wind again in company—while five couple went on to show that their run fox had escaped into a gravel-pit-earth. So deep was the ground that the first two miles of steep undulating grass and plough were enough to stop anything that had known a dealer's yard within six months; and before the burst was over the line was dotted with exhausted horse-flesh. Only a few of a large field started to ride on good terms; and no others could ever gain a yard. There had already been two pumping circles round the precipices of Little Dalby and the Punchbowl; when the run began suddenly at the same point whence started the great gallop in the fog, of last season. There were some thirty starters across the road where the Leesthorpe Bottom runs nearly to the base of the Punchbowl. The wired difficulty has been broken down; and twenty men took the right of the stream, the others the left along the plough. The latter had to jump across again as quickly as

they could ; for hounds bore up forthwith for Leesthorpe, and bent still more to the right when over across the Pickwell road. The right division was served at once by a bridge over the other gully which now met them ; and they alone had a chance of seeing the chase. Hounds had a clear lead ; the fences were light, but every ditch was overflowing and every furrow was a sheet of water, while hill and valley succeeded each other short and severe. Mr. Munro on the ex-steeplechaser Fireking, cut out the work ; Mr. Arthur Coventry in his track. Immediately next, and riding more quickly and brilliantly than a lady is often seen to do in such a Leicestershire burst as this was Miss Parsons—followed by Sir John Lister-Kaye, Capt. Smith, Lord Carington, &c. As they swept round behind Somerby Village, closer order was attained when a momentary check took place, and then a more level country carried them forward for Owston. As that village hove in sight came the difficulty, the change of scent, a double back on the part of the body of the pack ; and the cream of the run was over.

Ranksboro' found fun for the afternoon. It was a chilly damp waiting on the brow over the gorse till Reynard consented to go. Then he ran the plain towards Oakham, before bearing up to take them a dashing twelve minutes into Orton Park Wood. A sheepdog was ready for him as he issued beyond, so back he came to Ranksboro', just touching it before giving them some charming quick hunting over the Langham Flat—where the most gluttonous of riders must have found food enough for his jumping appetite. This pursuit, too, ended indefinitely ; and recourse was again had to the Gorse. Eighteen cracking minutes over the grass from Ranksboro', with a horse fresh enough, and good enough, to keep within reasonable reach of hounds, forms, to my unambitious mind, an item to light up an afternoon's existence, cheer an evening's thought, and fix a bright spot in memory—better than many more prolonged and costly pleasures in other spheres of life. This is, no doubt, only an enthusiast's view. But are not all

foxhunters enthusiasts? And if to be so is a reproach, then we own to glory in our shame.

Eighteen minutes was not all the run; but it was the best and quickest part of it, and no halt or hesitation came till then. The course had been over Ranksboro' Hill, and curved towards Somerby along a goodly line, till it pierced the plantation bordering the Somerby and Cold Overton Road. The military and ex-military element (who form a large proportion of Leicestershire's Hunt and hardriding society) were fully to the front, in the persons of Captains Candy, Smith, and Mr. H. Brocklehurst, who, with Mr. Beaumont, had been, perhaps, the leading spirits. After this point hounds ran nicely nearly to Orton Park Wood. But well as they go while close at their fox it was not a day to kill him; and as soon as slow hunting began, scent seemed to fail and quickly die out. Yet it was truly a fine, and a hard, day's sport.

MARCH SUN AND SCENT.

THURSDAY, March 18.—A sunny gallop with the Quorn, and half an hour to tell it. A bye-day had been ordered for Barkby; and had been quietly kept for a true Quorn field. The wind was in the east; the sun had the whole heaven to himself; the fallows were dry as piecrust; and, in short, to go a-hunting to-day seemed about as fitting an experiment as that of Ingoldsby's children who "went a-skating, all on a summer's day."

But a seven or eight minutes' preface from Scraughton Gorse showed the remarkable phenomenon of hounds going their hardest through the cloud of dust raised by their passage over a wheatfield; and gave a hope, an instinct, of the coming fray. Now they are away again from Scraughton Gorse—this time nearly up the wind, and with a point for Keyham. All the field has been mustered at the Thurnby end of the covert; and the scream *Away* is dimly heard. You may glance at your watch,

rebutton your coat—even exchange some out-of-place chaff, as you gallop the side lane to reach the bordering road. But the glimpse of white speckled forms, streaking the green meadow beyond the intervening trees, must stir you to life and energy, if you have any ; and you swing the corners and drive into the open with either spur well. How on earth Firr can find time to work his horn at such a moment is more than an outside mortal can explain. It is going hard ; and so is he, down the turf slope to the Scraughton Bottom, a boggy, hateful place, with a strong guard of thorns beyond. Mr. Herbert Flower loses his horse in making a way through ; Captain Barstow gets to the other side with a flounder, but is floored by the following oxer, where the near ditch is filled with thorns and the far rail lies wide. Firr is alone in near pursuit of hounds flying like the wind : Captain Barclay is straining after him, and Captain Heygate in his wake, with Lady Florence Dixie close up. Gallop as they can, hounds beat them all the way, for this furious fourteen minutes (as well as I could time it) to Barkby Holt. Gates help them, and fences lie easy. There is a bridge over the Keyham Bottom (as they leave the village to the right), and the Beeby difficulty is overcome by galloping the village road. “He’s just afore you !” cries one rustic. “ You’ll be on him in a minute ! ” shouts another. They had left covert at his brush ; but he is never in sight again, till they spring into the field beside Barkby Holt. He had meant passing the wood, but when half way over the stubble had realised his peril—and here he comes across them, with his brush already down and his tongue hanging. Tally ho ! Lu—lu!! The leading couples course him through the fence ; and his doom is sealed—though he may, and will, yet postpone it for a while. He seeks a breathing moment by crossing from the Holt to the Gorse ; but quickly they bring him back, and out where he entered. He takes a comrade away with him ; and a plough team divides them, sending one to Beeby, the other to Queniborough. A trusty old lady of the pack has never been dumb or faltering since they entered the Holt, and she elects for

Queniboro'. Running well again over grass, picking it slowly over hard-baked fallows, they nearly reach the village of the needlespire ; turn to Barkby ; hunt up to their wearied quarry in the park of Barkby Hall ; and jump upon him at the spot of the Meet—in honour of the good sportsman who bade us welcome, and whose chief thought is ever for the interests of the Hunt. Fifty-seven minutes was the reckoned time start to kill ; and to have achieved such a run on such a day was indeed a triumph, and a boon unexpected.

Not the least extraordinary part of the run was the performance of a twelve-hand pony, rough and unridden—who, escaping from a grass field, cut down all the hard men of the Quorn by riding in Firr's footsteps from Scrauptoft Gorse to Barkby Holt—and on to the death !

All through the dust and sun which prevailed during the three later weeks of March there was a scent quite inconsistent with such conditions. It seldom happened but that hounds could run—generally fairly, sometimes well. And as foxes are much the greater sufferers under the heat, and consequently were unable to travel away from their pursuers, there was as much slaughter achieved last month as at any period of the season. Blood is the huntsman's object. The process of his efforts for it form the source of our interest ; and his success is almost an equal delight to us. Thus, in spite of summer days and dusty winds, we saw foxes hunted up and killed, and had a "vast o' fun" by the way. There was a drawback that forced itself home to many of us, and protrudes itself now whenever the stable is visited. We could harden our hearts for a fall, but we could not harden our horses' legs, and the casualties among the latter have been as pronounced as the fatality to foxes. It may fairly be set down that March has done more damage to studs and pockets than all the rest of this varied season. For the last week or so, in place of galloping the driest ridge, your aim was ever to secure the dampest furrow. But, pick your place as cleverly and carefully as you could, you never knew how iron bound was the

ground beyond your fence, till the grunt of battered joints and the groan of a vigour painfully and suddenly checked echoed awfully beneath you. At the moment you almost realised the mischief done. You knew it better still the next morning, when the old weak spot had proclaimed itself beyond mistake, and “Harkaway must be throwed up for the summer” was the morning report of the man of the stable. The grass, where exposed to March influence, resounded like a drumhead to the stroke of the hoof. Old horses cracked up in landing upon it, or hurt themselves at their fences for very fear of jumping, while young horses met with a shock that might take them months to forget. Yet when hounds are in cry it is hard to turn aside from a little place that at ordinary times would be seized upon as just our chance—and, as sure as we gallop a hundred yards to the right for a gate, so certainly will they sheer off two hundred to the left, and put us at once out of distance.

On Monday, March 29th, this state of things was in fullest force. The Quorn ran hotly. It was dangerous to jump, and distressing to gallop; but if you did not do both to some extent, you had no chance of seeing the merry hour’s pursuit, which, if it did not actually end in blood, brought a fox to death’s very door at the mouth of his own earth. It was positively distressing to see him roll through the fence bordering his refuge—and to none did the painful sight come more deeply home than to him who had hoped to avert so sad a finale. “Poor thing, I’m sure he’ll die in the earth,” was uttered with a pathos and feeling that none but a brokenhearted huntsman could have thrown into it. That fox deserved a more glorious end; they had hunted him from Mr. Cradock’s never-failing Spinney at Six Hills over every difficulty of plough that he could pick out for them; they had pursued him stoutly over the well-honoured (and, happily, well-gated) Hoby Lordship; coursed him round the farmyards and cottage gardens of Ragdale till he slipped them for a moment behind the village, and with a last struggle staggered to Shoby Scoles—and the open earth. It was a hard and well-worked chase, honestly meriting the

mouthful of blood that had almost reached the thirsting palates. The enthusiasm of onlookers had been worked up to a pitch nearly as high, and ten times as loudly expressed, as that of the executive. With a sinking fox frequently close in view, there was shouting and shrieking that was truly appalling, and furious riding that at least was magnificent if not quite foxhunting.

The Quorn wound up their season with a byeday at Beeby. This was on Monday, April 5th; and though the postcards only went forth on Saturday night, rumour and the telegraph wires had been busy, and the gathering was one that included members of quite half a dozen other Hunts besides the Quorn. The Pytchley, Cottesmore, Sir Bache, Belvoir, South Notts, Meynell, Atherstone were all represented. Yet there was scarcely a crowd, such as we get hardened to—only a strong company, all rather eager to ride. It was their last chance; and if distinction could not be achieved to-day, ambition—that, perhaps, has long aspired in vain—would have to lie dormant and unsatisfied for months to come. And truly, when thunderstorms break upon the sport, when the heavens are streaked with lightning at one moment and smiling through a glorious rainbow the next, when the hedges are patched with bursting foliage, and lambs run under your horse's legs, it is time to admit that foxhunting may rest. The happy whirl of daily healthy excitement and companionship must be put aside for occupations that may, possibly, bring more grist to the mill, or that, quite as probably, are no whit more profitable either to system or exchequer. After this week we may cast our hunting kit aside, betake ourselves whither we will or must, leaving orders that the stable and its establishment are to be conducted during the summer on principles strictly in accordance with the economical views of the new government. We cannot *all* afford to bed our horses down in drawing-rooms as soon as the season is over—though this is a free country, and we have no right to pass a remark on those who choose to do so. The best of everything is, generally, good enough for Melton. Why should not the same standard, or even a higher one, be applied to its noble steeds? At any rate, the experi-

ment is in one instance having a fair trial; and the good quadruped who is called upon to submit himself as the subject submits very placidly to the trial. He is housed amid damask hangings, stretches himself on a Turkey carpet, and a velvet ottoman supports his manger. And this is how the idea suggested itself to young Melton's fertile brain. It was before breakfast, some hours, that a rider came up the drawing-room stairs. Had he ridden down again, he would have been the richer by an honest penny. But his trusted steed refused the office ; his wager was lost ; and all he could do was to make the best of his failure by selling his horse upstairs for a century less than he had refused for him on terra firma. The winner of the bet was the buyer ; and he thus finds himself in a position to afford scaffolding and crane, by means of which his new purchase will eventually return to humbler quarters. At present the latter appears to be very much at his ease, apparently feeling in no degree abashed by the novelty and grandeur of his position. The occasion of his descent is to be held as high holiday by the townsfolk, and will be considered as the winding-up event of the Melton season.



SEASON 1880-81.

OCTOBER BREWING.



HEN the Quorn advertise for t e n o'clock in their best grass country, when the leaves

are beginning to drop, and the clipping machine has worked its way round the stable, it is fairly time to drive the quill over Leicestershire once again, if only to let absentees know how the ball already set afoot is likely to roll on. *Merrily*, indeed, it should go, if hard and patent facts may be made to stand for symptoms.

But this is Thursday night that I am writing, and, an October Thursday though it be, it has been marked with a run that should make more than one Quornite wish he had been there instead of at Newmarket. I can only tell it plainly and hurriedly, and, as it were, for those to whom the ground is more or less familiar. Here it is, as far as post and press allow.

Baggrave again! As it reaped the final honours of last season (and those of the one before), so it has scored the first of this. The Quorn met at Beeby for cubhunting; and

honestly and successfully they chivvied the cubs in Baggrave Covert till midday, when hounds lunched upon one at the Hall door, and men could not but accept the example and the General's ever-ready cheer.

But the run? Casual readers need only glance at the fact that it was a point of *eight miles and a half in one hour and five minutes*, and entirely over the grass. Quornites will follow me while I sketch geography and outline. They all know Carr Bridge Spinney—a miniature plantation half way between Baggrave and Lowesby. It was from here the chase began, and it was at Stapleford Park it ended. As is only to be expected in mid-October, it was a purely local field that clustered on the hillside. They watched one fox twist into a rabbit-hole at their very feet; and when in a moment a second one scurried along the brookside, they were content to set him down as another of the same sort, and to look forward only to some brief spell of hedgerow-hunting, till he too should be accounted for. So they cantered leisurely through a couple of gates, scarcely realising, apparently, that hounds had not only flung themselves out before voice and horn had summoned them, but were already away over the brow, a first leafy hedge drowning all but their sparkling cry. Some half-dozen men were awake enough to take up running at once; the rest only gradually awoke to the fact that to see hounds required riding to them—now as much as heretofore. To Thimble Hall was an uphill mile of aftermath, with a couple of pieces of timber, and a brace of blind fences on its slope; and now the pack were fully a field to the good, and galloping had to be earnest to be of use. Few studs have galloping condition in October; and he was a lucky man who had condition under him (as complete as was needed) to-day. Crossing the road by Thimble Hall, hounds bore down for a brief moment for Twyford, then crossing the road between that place and Burrough, passed over the new railway and the brow beyond. Circling towards the Melton Steeplechase course, they bent to the right again; and, putting Burrough Village on the left.

ran the steep gorges that lead to Sowerby. Another deep valley took them between Somerby and the Punchbowl, and carried them on to Leesthorpe—the first twenty minutes having been racing pace, and the run throughout being very quick, with hounds never lifted except for one single second's help. They were over Leesthorpe Big Field almost before any horseman entered it, and the nearest of these were Messrs. T. and F. Cradock, Mr. Johnson, the Huntsman, and the new first whip, George Cottrell, from the Belvoir. Straight on they flew for Wild's Lodge, near which a cart had diverted the fox in his route ; and, bearing away short of Berry Gorse, they struck up the hill towards Ranksborough. On reaching the pseudo-Whissendine, however, they held along its farther bank for Stapleford (hounds about this period running quite alone), got up to their fox a field before reaching Laxton's Covert, and for some seconds were all round him in a hedge-row. Firr had come up to them again, and the prize seemed almost in his hand. But the luck of war was against him. His fox slipped through their midst, and reached, first the covert, and then a drain under the road, and so a splendid run ended without blood. Hounds must have covered some thirteen or fourteen miles of country, and did it, not merely unassisted, but most of the time running far ahead of everyone, though some half-a-dozen men were riding as straight and hard as if Christmas had passed and carried off all leaf from hedges and grass from ditches. The day was bright and cold and sunshiny : there was a great scent (as need not be said) : and their fox must have been of wonderful stoutness to stand before them thus. If we see many runs that can compare with this for point, time, and distance, the season of '80-81 will indeed be an exceptional one.

• *A LATE BEGINNING.*

THE smartest item of the Quorn history for November, 1880, was enacted on Friday last, November 27th, after meeting at Gaddesby. A violent wet morning reduced the muster to a small and roughly-clad field hardly in keeping with the dignity of the Hunt, scarcely a member of which had courage, or it may be extravagance, enough to appear at the covert-side in pink. Indeed, as far as I remember, about the only gay and orthodox garment was the outcome of Irish landed property—a fact that may be useful to Messrs. Parnell and Dillon, serving them to “point a moral and adorn a tale.”

The gallop I refer to came from Ashby Pastures—only seventeen or eighteen minutes, but very fast and very charming—a burst, hardly a run, but very welcome in this hitherto eventless season.

Let us suppose that you, reader, never saw the jungly depths of Ashby Pastures. You will find it a square manageable wood of a hundred acres or so, on a gentle slope towards the east. There is comparatively little timber left to obscure the view or obstruct the sound of horn or hound; but bramble and thorn grow rankly, and matted grass works in to choke up every interstice. Even the rides are almost obliterated by the wild growth of covert; and a few mud-tracks, deep and narrow, are the only paths by which you can wade your way through the wood. However, you work slowly on after the huntsman, hock-deep in soft sludge, while the gale whistles and howls through the trees, cutting the scene of coming action completely out of hearing of the many who still remain upwind of the covert. There is no crash about the hound-music that proclaims a find. The thicket is too dense for that. The wavering cry is scarcely exciting; for it seems impossible that a fox can be driven quickly out of such a fastness. But he wants no driving—the wiry form that comes bounding over

the undergrowth, with the noise of a deer. His white mask confronts you like an apparition. The lithe body flashes aside with a wave of a brush that looks broken, if not bare, at half its length. You may have seen many a fox before, and every one of them gave you a tingle, if you are fit to go out fox-hunting. But there is a dash, a devil, about this ugly-faced fellow that makes you grip the saddle at once. Hounds are bustling after him almost before you can scream ; and the huntsman flings them on to his back to a tune that ought to have pierced even such a breeze. Splashing and trotting down the covert you may be through a little handgate as quick as any others of the down-wind division ; but already hounds are swinging beyond a new-sown wheatfield. The proprietor is one who has hot moments, but in cool blood allows himself a substantial interest in the chase. Who knows ? this may be one of his hot moments ! Truth often hits hard—when well worded. A pitchfork might hit harder still ; and there's a great brawny fellow running between the pack and you. Hope he can't stay over the plough ! Will your young 'un face the brook at the bottom ? Lucky, by Jove, you put on the spurs *with* rowels this morning. This is better. You are on turf now, and there's not half as much danger in front as you imagined when behind. Rather a cropper than cold steel any day. But the pack are a full field ahead, and a dozen of the dark-draped wet weather field between you and them. Hounds have got away all but in view, and Firr's signalling horn could have been but a passing shaft up the wind. Hurry along the grass, turn as short as you can into stubble, gallop a cart track, and there you are—pulled up short at a locked gate which Firr has just skimmed and which has brought up all others aghast. Right Turn. Left Wheel—a little fence and a bigger one—the latter really only big because the man just before you worked elbows and heels, made his horse jump a stride too soon, and frightened you terribly in the effort. Ridge and furrow next—hounds increasing their advantage as they go—Firr popping over the fences in their wake—Captain

Middleton going hard on Musketeer to reach alongside—first whip driving knowledge into a stickey one, by help of example and ding-dong determination. Greasy stile and broad-plashed hedge furrows lying right and furrows lying wrong—but good going now, and the pace tremendous. As far as you see from the distance, there is no one else “in it.” Few others started; none others kept up the pace. A parallel lane has served a dozen, who reach the Melton turnpike at Kirby as soon as any. These have seen the chase all the way, without hazard or the trouble of the intermediate fences. The same order meantime has been maintained by those riding the line, while with a screaming scent hounds flew over the grass pastures, as the chase bent a crescent shape across the wind—working towards Melton instead of at one time towards Cream Gorse. A mile or so beyond Kirby, a great fox is plainly to be seen toiling across a field on the left, just before hounds reached the road from the right (fifteen minutes exactly, they tell me). A few odd minutes more, and the pack is stopped on the railway embankment, where many a fox has been bred, where many a fox has got to ground before, and whence a train is now to be seen issuing in full steam from Melton Station. Captain and Mrs. Stirling, Messrs. Coupland Adair, Peak, Harrison, and half a dozen others form nearly all the party up at the moment.

A RUN UNSEEN.

TUESDAY, November 7th.

THE Cottesmore have had a great good run over their best country. And the shameful fact has to be recorded that not a soul saw it! A spoilt dinner, a vexed evening, is a harvest that ought to be reaped to-night by three hundred foiled labourers—whose toil has been in vain, whose bread has turned sour in their mouths, and who think just a tenth part of themselves as when they went out this morning. Yes, the mournful,

miserable fact remains, that no one was found good enough to keep hounds in sight in the best run that has yet come off. I can tell you what happened generally. The plaints and excuses that are forthcoming would fill the volume of the season. A right turn at this point or that might, one would fancy, have made more than one man the hero of the day, and of the winter. But no one got the turn, so at least there is none of the heartburning of envy. As it is, the only note is that of bewailment, self-reproach, and meagre excuse.

It wanted five minutes to two in the afternoon when hounds flew to Goddard's scream on the Launde side of Launde Wood—the crisp sharp air, that had succeeded the dripping fog of the morning, bringing the sound through the wood as clear as a boatswain's whistle. As we hurried out of the main ride, the fox was just skimming the hillside overlooking the Abbey; and soon a complete chain of signals marked his route over the two miles to Owston Wood. Hounds came dashing out, over-eager and headstrong, and flung through and beyond the scent half a dozen times in the hurried scramble across the valley. Between the adjoining properties of Launde and Withcote run two great gulfs. The first could either be rounded by a wide sweep to the road on the right, or be explored leftward for a bridge that certainly used to exist. It was there still, but has been converted from a bridle-way to a footbridge, by the appalling expedient of substituting for one of its two gates a stile and footboard. So in single file the body of pursuers on this side had first to squeeze through a little handgate, and then to jump the timber off the bridge. There was no great danger or difficulty about the process; but it took time—and it must be remembered that we gallop after the hounds by hundreds, not by scores, in this country. Most people, however, who kept pushing on, reached Owston Wood (at a point just opposite Withcote Hall) as soon as the hounds. And now comes the turning-point of my dismal story. Directly they were inside the great covert, hounds settled down to run with a vigour that we have seldom seen this season—never

certainly in covert. Their fox turned westward at once, and ran the deep rides the whole length of the wood. There was nothing to stop hounds; but there was mire, and clay, and water, bogs, and holes to hinder you, however doggedly and desperately you plunged on, thankful if you could but catch a glimpse of the rearguard of the pack swinging round the corner of a ride. Men who had dashed through the wood, and even turned immediately parallel with the hounds, were in no better plight. They had to make a considerable détour to begin with; they had to open a dozen gates along the edge of the wood, and they then had to wade along a deep muddy lane as stickey as any of the rides inside. To make a long story short, no one succeeded in reaching the extreme end of Owston Wood (towards Whadborough Hill) as quick as the hounds—except two visitors from Ireland, Lord Cloncurry and Mr. Clinton, who had fought their way through the wood, only to issue with blown horses, utterly unable to cope with the stiff succession of timber and ox fences that opposed them. So they were compelled to put up with the sight of the pack fleeting swiftly away like a dream in the distance. Round the outside of the covert Mr. Harter appeared just in time to catch sight of a tail hound or two struggling over the second grassy slope; but before he could jump out of the road and climb the first, even these guiding stars were lost to view, and all afterwards was blind darkness and hateful disappointment. Mr. Tailby, the Messrs. Gosling, Sir Bache Cunard, and Neal and Goddard, are none of them likely men to be left behind at Owston Wood, under ordinary circumstances. But here they were, with a dozen others, equally keen and ready, galloping wildly over the country without a beacon, with scarcely a notion, to guide them. And such a country! That's where half the bitterness lies. Let me finish my tale, and forget it. A grander, sounder, fairer extent of grass does not exist than that between Owston, Marfield, Burrough, and Somerby. It is as much finer, freer, and in every way superior to ordinary ten-acre pasturage as the blue swell of the Atlantic is to the

muddy chops of the Channel. Last year hounds took part of this line more than once—running towards John o' Gaunt, and over the Twyford Brook to ground near Burrough Village. Now they must have travelled the same path, and carried it a long way farther—and all at a flying pace. At the Burrough and Marfield lane, after a two-mile gallop into the teeth of the wind, a carter said the pack had passed by several minutes since. Where last year's fox got to ground, a yokel told them triumphantly that “the hounds was miles ahead, and never a one of yer with 'em.” At Burrough-on-the Hill, it was learned that fox and hounds had passed along the valley close under the village, and had then borne round for Somerby. In fact, while men under some inexplicable illusion had been tearing up the wind, the chase had gradually bent down it, and left them on an outer circle. Two sportsmen of experience, who have both stood the buffet of wind and weather on distant seas, alone steered below the wind, and at length cut across the line somewhere near Somerby, the pack having then been running some five-and-forty minutes from the start. The one found a single hound with a lead of half a field, two couple more in hot pursuit, and the rest just striking off at a tangent on a fresh line ; and he went on with the former. The other was so baffled by the aspect of affairs—hounds branching off in two distinctly different directions—that feeling himself altogether unable to decide upon which could be the right line, he determined on a middle course of action, and remained where he was. The two couple and a half, meanwhile, sped across to complete the circle to Owston Wood ; while the body of the pack got to Knossington, and there to difficulties.

Here my story ends ; and I hope it may be many a day before I have to write such another. It is worthy of remark that the Cottesmore hounds have only twice this season met with scent enough to really run. On both these occasions they have had all the fun to themselves !

MASTER AS HUNTSMAN.

ON Friday, Dec. 17, the Quorn had a round of sport from noon till dark—three runs and a galloping scent. A sharp wind-frost had whitened the grass and glazed the fallows; the sky was cloudless, the sun brilliant, the wind in the north-east—and it looked for all the world as if our old friend of last winter and the winter before was once again upon us in earnest. It was all we could do to get to covert—the meet being at Ingarsby, the residence of that good yeoman Mr. Carver. It was more than we could do to get there in time: and it was lucky for most of us that Hungerton Foxholes was drawn blank to begin with. For though the grass was only crisp on its upper blades, as if dipped in frosted sugar, the roads were hard and unsafe as a polished oak floor—that most dangerous and undignified of floorings. Everyone had arrived, though, by the time the Master had thrown hounds in to Botany Bay. Poor Firr was still writhing at home under the pain of a maimed frame, and that worse agony to a keen huntsman of hounds being in the field without him. A quick find, much shouting in the road—and over the mound of the Coplow into the gorse on its southern slope. Three couple of old hounds kept matters moving on across the valley at once—throwing their tongues loudly to call on their comrades, already straying to a fresh line in covert. The ladypack was out to-day, as quick and hardworking a lot as ever took the field.

Luncheon in Leicestershire is a highly dangerous—if a very tempting—institution, especially when indulged in according to the elaborate fashion of our time. Big gold or silver cases, requiring both hands to hold—while, to be correct, the owner stands dismounted, with legs planted wide apart and manly waistcoat open to the breeze—conduce very largely to both comfort and appearance. But when hounds slip away in a sudden second from one of our small coverts, and said owner

is caught in this position—with his mouth so full of bejellied mutton pie that he cannot even call out for his horse—the bravery of his bearing is not unlikely to be lowered for the day. This is no fancy portrait, nor even a rare instance. Were there not at least fifty fair sportsmen caught posing thus when the Belvoir set off to run from Woodwell Head last Ash Wednesday? And were there not as many more thus left sorrowful to-day at Scraughtoft?

The site of the late gorse is this season only marked by a few brambles and the young shoots of the burnt whin. There is nothing to stop a fox there a moment: and they never dwell long in the Holt alongside. They found in the latter ten-acre brake before half the field were within sight or sound; and then most of those present galloped round the southernmost end of the wood instead of striking through towards the gorse. Hounds left covert with their fox almost in view; went like lightning across the two grass fields to Scraughtoft Hall, and crossed the road short of the shrubberies. The whip was there to open the gate and cheer them over; and then, with their fox frequently to be seen not half a field before them, they ran as hard as they could stretch over the neat nice country in the direction of Barkby Holt. Their only immediate attendants were Capts. Smith and Middleton, Messrs. Harter and Baldock, and a lady on a brown mare. The fences came quick and often strong; but they were all to be ridden at a gallop—and, in fact, were best suited by the pace. The course thus run was not a very long one—being only to the Keyham-and-Beeby Road, and back on the nearer side to Keyham Village. Something between fifteen and twenty minutes probably covered this part of the gallop; but it was as warm and quick a burst as need be, for the fortunate few. In spite of the rime still whitening the surface, the grass was everywhere sound and firm; and no real difficulty crossed their path from the time they started till they met the less lucky majority on the way to the village. Their fox was already nearly blown, and now doubled back almost among the field. Being hunted

back to Beeby he took refuge in a drain, was bolted, and soon run into.

Nor was the fun of the fair yet over. Barkby Holt was close at hand—a goodly certainty. When the gorse, annexed to it, was cut down in the autumn, two, if not three, strong earths were brought to light in the thickest part of the covert—explaining amply why foxes were often so suddenly lost, or sometimes not found at all. Since this discovery the Holt has been quite its old self again. And this afternoon, besides at least a brace of foxes, it held a stinging scent. I never saw a fox more closely rattled than the one to which the little ladies now gave their attention. Two or three times he made believe to break, but really never meant going till obliged. So they sent him round and round the wood for a quarter of an hour—bristling over the rides close at his brush, driving him hotly round the outskirts of the covert, till he was fairly terrified into boldness, and dared the open in earnest. By this time, too, he had “done a lot of work” as the huntsmen say: and was rather handicapped for a trial of strength with hounds over a country. The same remark would apply equally to many of the horses that had been plunging round and round the inner depths of the Holt. They came out, like the fox, half draggled and with much of the steel out of them. There was still, though, any amount of “go” to be found in their riders; for which they were glad enough to find a vent in lancing over the Beeby fences. Many were trying to retrieve—or at any rate to make amends for—the loss of the midday plum; two or three were riding elate, with the taste of the fruit still in their mouths; and, urged on by one exciting cause or the other, the pursuit of hounds was carried on by the whole division with a zest as marked as that of the hounds themselves after their fox. Past Beeby to Scraught Hall they went a bee line—hovering only for a second at the Keyham Road. Five feet of solid timber frowned defiance; and the boldest turned aside for gate or gap. No, not the boldest. There was one who appeared to have come from some distant, hardriding land: and now found him-

self opposite the impediment, side by side with one who, in our Liliputian land, has long been held a giant—one who has, perhaps, levelled more oxers than any single carpenter has set up in a lifetime. Regarding the timber as one might glance at a big man whose head is streaked with silver, while one assures him that his grey hair alone saves him the thrashing he would otherwise receive—the stranger muttered audibly, “ If



J. COUPLAND, ESQ.

hounds only weren't at fault,” shook his head disappointedly; and he, too, turned aside.

For the third time in the day the flat meadows by the Keyham brook were crossed; and when Scraughton laurels were reached holloa and hat were raised in the road beyond. Hounds, however, took some time to clear the shrubberies, and, though their fox was hardly able to travel at a walk, he crept on to the Gorse, and they failed to touch him again. From Barkby Holt to the end was twenty-five minutes—to conclude a day of excellent fun.

NEW YEAR'S DAY, 1881.

A CHANGE came in with daylight ; a soothing warmth flooded the snow ; the grass burst forth with the sun ; and, with hearts elate and spirits above debt and difficulty, we jumped to breeches and boots. Pickwell was the Cottesmore meet, and thither we splashed, through inches of half-congealed mud—hugging ourselves over the glad surprise and the shifting landscape. There was still something in the stable to ride. Sunday's rest would bring something else past the turning-point of blow or sprain. Friday's mount would come Monday—and anyone who, in our climate or our life, lays plans for more than three days at a time is only likely to hatch disappointment. In fox-hunting you must live for the day ; your imagining may take the form of hope, and it will then enhance all you realise. But never let it be calculating or procrastinating. A chance once missed—whether a good hunting day or a start in a run—does not readily come again : and a lost opportunity will linger longer through summer months than many happy memories. At least this is the philosophy of a mind indifferently constituted. No doubt there are many as badly balanced, a too absorbing enthusiasm being in part to blame for a faulty equilibrium.

In the leisurely journey of some three miles to Orton Park Wood, after a short burst from the Punchbowl, horses had every chance of regaining their wind. The brief gallop already experienced was held to have been anything but sufficient to allow of a change of saddles ; and as things happened I fancy but few men ever got their second horses afterwards. The field had scarcely manned the good gravel ride in Orton Park Wood before ; from sign or symptom or instinct, they became alive to the fact that a fox had gone somewhere. Hounds flung themselves out of sight into the underwood ; Neal and the Master shifted uneasily about ; but for a time no tangible sound or token came to proclaim a fox away. A certain few

knowing ones, however—whose movements it is always desirable to watch, if one's own ears or craftiness fail—were at once on the alert, and shuffled quietly down the unmetalled but well-muddled ride towards Oakham. By the time they reached the handgate a holloa ample and shrill set them off round the wood to its Braunston side. Half the pack were already out of covert, gliding down the slope beyond ; and horn and cheer soon brought the others on. But, after the first few fields of sharp and pretty going, the least exciting part of the run was its course to Owston Wood (a turn short of Prior's Coppice and by Chiselton Spinney). The grass was sound, and the fences clean ; but hounds did not settle down to run with vigour. In fact, it was palpable that in more than one instance the stupid beasts did not get out of the way nearly quick enough for ambitious riding. We have learned, by the way, that a prophet has to come abroad for honour—though be it noted in all goodwill, that if some men find honour thrust upon them, thrusting on a strange pack is better honoured in the breach than the observance.

Hounds hunted their way the length of the Little Owston Wood, emerged at the bisecting road, and never touched a covert again. On the other hand, they ran really hard for an *hour and forty minutes*, with scarcely a moment's check, over some of the most beautiful grass country in Leicestershire and Rutland, and killed their fox. Melted snow and recent rain had left the ground wet and splashy rather than deep and sticky ; and, somehow or other, horses were able to go pushing on, in many cases, to the end. Or as they tailed off, of course they left no mark behind them ; and with the limit of one's own tether, one dropped into obscurity as the others, like spray from a jet of water. Surely a single fox could only have lived so long before hounds on the plea that he was not burst at starting, but had leisure to travel well ahead before the pace became oppressive. The run was something of a ring, no doubt. But a ring that takes an hour and forty minutes' galloping must embrace more than a fair extent of ground—

and *such* ground, as all you who know the country will confess. To Owston Village was a mile, or perhaps two, of small enclosures and quick-recurring fences. Each fence appeared to have one spot in it more tempting and easy than the rest ; and Capt. Stephen seemed quickest to discern and seize upon that spot. As the chase swept on, it passed the very point at which the great Ranksboro' run of '77 came to an end. (How a few years' riding over a country, still more a few years' writing about it, imbues every fence and every field with a memory !) And, by the way, how the actors on our little stage shift, and how quickly ! Scarcely one of those who drew rein then are here to-day. Poor Major Whyte-Melville, Lord Carington, Lord Wolverton (no, his rein was drawn just before, and so was Mr. Tomkinson's), Lord Huntly, Lord Wicklow, Mr. Frewen, Mr. Russell, Capt. Jacobson—these made up almost the number who rode through that memorable gallop, and not one of them is hunting here now ! Custance is, if I remember right, the sole remnant of the band—standing forth a memorial of that event as he does of Col. Thomson's famous Waterloo Run.

But I must get forward with the present. At Owston Village hounds swung to the right for Somerby, ran parallel to the road thither for a mile or more, till at the spot where our morning fox was lost, they bore away still more—leaving Somerby Village on the left. Messrs. Cecil Chaplin, Hanbury, Harter, and Capt. Middleton were perhaps quickest and nearest to turn with them, and to land into the Somerby-and-Knossington Road. The two former jumped an uncompromising piece of timber abreast into the field beyond ; Capt. Middleton found his way into the same field on the right ; one or two others followed their lead, and the rest snicked the-road for the corner immediately at hand. Hounds were running fiercely all this time ; but paused a little on the second hill top after a third road (Somerby-and-Cold Overton) : and the van recovered its strength—Messrs. Baird, Blair, Finch, Newton, W. and E. Chaplin, Gosling frères, Marshall, and Adair, promi-

ment with others. (Forty-five minutes to here.) Neal held hounds forward up a single field ; they hit it off at once, and were away again before horses had snatched more than half a minute's breathing time. But even this helped them a great deal ; and allowed them to struggle onwards over the swampy grass. Severity neither of pace nor ground appeared to affect Mr. Cecil Chaplin's grey, any more than did the fact that he was carrying—well, no feather. Even after forty-five minutes the two preferred stiff timber to a crowded gateway ; and went on at once with a hundred yards advantage—to be increased rather than diminished, as hounds left Ranksboro' Hill and Cold Overton Fishpond just to the right, to cross the Oakham-and-Melton Road. I may be pardoned for repeating a dictum from a dozen mouths, viz., that a welter weight never went better to hounds in a fast run than Mr. Chaplin did to-day.

Along the brookside to Whissendine Village the fox had been viewed ; and the huntsman was able to save a couple of sticky fallows. Grief by this time had been frequent ; coats and hats, and even habits, bore testimony to the quality of the gallop ; horses were sobbing ; while jumping was at a discount, and very feeble when enforced. Passing just to the right of Whissendine Village, the chase went on—the pace getting extra credit from the blown condition of the horses. The ragged bridle-road that is known as the Langham Lane was eagerly seized upon, while the pack streamed along the meadows on the right. They dwelt, however, a moment or two to let all join them who could, before they bore again more round towards the village of Langham. Mr. Hugh Lowther, jumping out of the road, here cut across their front, in time to view their beaten fox creeping along the bank of the brook behind the village. Bar accidents he was theirs now. But that accident nearly came in the shape of a passing train : and while a single hound dashed forward close after the fox, it was a minute or two before the huntsman could extricate the others from the railway and bring them to the front. Burley Woods loomed on the hill not a mile away : but the sanctuary

was just beyond poor Reynard's strength. He could go no further than one of the little Burley Spinneys, and there they killed him—one hour and forty minutes from the find, and as severe and good a run as ever did credit to hounds and country. As I have before said, the point was the least remarkable part of the run : but take Owston Village and Burley Spinney to furnish a diameter, and you will find that the ring was not much less than seven miles across. And the very fact of the line being curved allowed a much larger proportion of the field to see the run—or much of it—than if it had been absolutely straight.

I must not conclude without expressing one word of heartfelt sorrow for the sad and sudden death of Mr. Herbert Flower, which took place last week. As a friend he endeared himself to all who knew him ; as a comrade in the hunting field he was always cheerful, pleasant, and consistent ; and a wide circle deeply lament his untimely end.

A SAMPLE OF THE SEASON.

JANUARY 29TH.

HIDDEN under deep ridges of drifted snow, there is little to denote the existence of the grass-country beyond its few trees and the tops of its highest hedges. Its sheep and cattle are housed ; its rich people have fled ; and its poor are suffering within doors. Work and play are alike at a standstill, or have moved elsewhere. Communication has just been opened up along country lanes ; but for some days villages unblessed with a resident butcher and baker were in danger of total starvation. Londoners are said to have run short of water. But better, surely, to go unwashed than unfed—better dirt than hunger. Cuttings have been made everywhere through the deep drifts that block the roads ; but to get from field to field is still in many places impracticable.

I hear of foxhunting in the snow in various places, and of a fox having been fairly run down by the Hambledon. Where

you can get about the lanes at all, you may, after all, be nearly as well off as if hunting in some unridable parts of Devonshire and Somerset at the best of times. There is just snow enough everywhere in Leicestershire to protect hounds' feet, except perhaps on the sharpest and roughest fallows, where the wind may have laid the ground almost bare. Sir Bache Cunard has been out; and Goodall has kept the Pytchley in exercise. But with both packs there has been the complaint of entire absence of scent. To add to this difficulty, a thick fog has prevailed on many days. I had the pleasure of assisting at one attempt during the past week; but, with foxes on foot two or three times, only the single hound that first brushed Reynard from his kennel could proclaim the fact. Afterwards only waving sterns, and a helpless, excited flinging round the place thus indicated, in any way denoted that a fox had passed. Scent on snow would seem (as far as a dozen opportunities have given one the right to judge) to be as varying as in open weather. At times hounds can really run with a head; and then, with the advantage of moving readily over the snow, will generally kill their fox. But with such a want of scent as on the day I refer to, foxes readily creep away as soon as found. Had hounds been able to run, they could only have been followed by the ear, so dense was the mist—and would likely enough have left you benighted in the fog. Riding was—if not an impossibility—a matter of unpleasant practice. Your horse was sure to find his level in the first grip or ditch, and as surely deposited you exactly where the ground was barest of snow. Tumbling on smooth ice is disagreeable enough; but to come with your ribs on the broken surface of a frozen ride is still less fun. You may get a deal more amusement—and keep yourself in condition much better—by running about on foot. A pair of long coarse stockings over your boots and legs will keep you dry and warm all day; while the cold sharp air will make you feel young again, and the work sets muscles in play that may have grown stiff with years of saddle or sauntering. But best of all—if your interest and sympathy incline

that way—is to see the glad delight of a pack let out to amuse itself after a week or two of kennel confinement or slow-objectless exercise. Every hound is fit to jump out of his skin with effusive pleasure; revels in the keen atmosphere, bounds joyously over the snow drifts, and busies himself in covert—as if in search of a long-lost friend.

GRIM DEATH.

FOXHUNTING came into full swing again on Thursday, Feb. 8, on which date the Quorn had a byday, and a somewhat eventful gallop from Grimston Gorse. It was not quite what the first sound of “forty-five minutes, and a kill in the open,” would lead one to infer, inasmuch as it was made up of two pieces, each with a separate finish of entirely distinct character. They started in an instant from the Gorse, and at the end of a five-and-twenty minutes’ hunt the Master and whips and most of the field were hovering round Old Dalby Wood in distracted search of Firr and the hounds. Of a sudden their anxious eyes were gladdened by the sight of the familiar coat and cap, perched on a roof in the valley below! Had he gone there to mock them, or, like Actæon, to escape from his own hounds? Not a bit of it. There he was, master of a triumphant situation—his conquered foe at his mercy. Face to face they stood, each baring his teeth to the very widest, Tom Firr with amused delight, bold Reynard with savage despair. At the mouth of a hothouse flue a coal-black mask was visible, the shining ivories and sparkling eyeballs making a picture that will certainly form material for Firr’s next nightmare. Nothing in the fanciful figurehead of Tom Moody’s ghost could hold a candle to it for expressive savagery. But charming as was the scene, and striking as was the comparison of facial effect, it was not deemed necessary unduly to prolong the *tête-à-tête*; so a pole and a sack were obtained, and pressure having been brought to bear upon the occupant of the flue, he was induced to change

his quarters into the sack, with a view to further proceedings. The next step was to convey him to suitable open ground. He was then shot out of his bag with a good start, and off he went over the country as black as soot could make him, a type to illustrate how the crow flies. His flight was a pretty strong one, too; for, though hounds never checked behind him, and his sable form could from time to time be seen flitting just in front, it took them two-and-twenty minutes before they could blacken their jaws on his waistcoat. An incident in this latter scurry fell but alarmingly short of a catastrophe. The ponds were still almost skateable, while snow lay in scattered ridges under the hedges so freely that half the jumps were on to the most speculative landing. The undaunted pluck that carries one of the most prominent of our lady riders* so generally into a good place, to-day dropped her quite out of her depth into a deep dug watering place, where she was only quite accidentally descried from a distance, fighting hard against the surrounding ice and the mad efforts of her horse to make use of her as a stepping-stone. Twice she was knocked quite under water, and once only felt her feet on any ground at all. Sympathy and outstretched hunting crops arrived only just in time, and a good constitution brought her out hunting the next day apparently none the worse. But it was a perilous adventure, with nothing that approached the laughable about it; and it would have been hard and inappropriate indeed, if one, who will dare anything that others will by field or flood (even to swimming the Wreake), should have ended her days in a horsepond.

AN INTERIM.—The next day (Friday, Feb. 4) the Quorn were in due course at Great Dalby—a field of four hundred (fierce and well mounted) taking the place of the quiet home party of the byeday. On a morning hot and promising they poured in from every side, till there was scarcely standing-room on the village green—and didn't they "loose off" down the slope of Gartree Hill, when the sight of a fox had

* Miss Paget.

quickened them into furious life, and the cry of a single hound had dissipated all self-control ? In vain the Master commanded, besought, implored for a moment's grace. Believe me, Mark Twain's impenitent mule is a fool to the aspirant for honours in Leicestershire when the fit is full upon him and the fiend of jealousy has possession of his soul. Ears he has none. Eyes he has, but only for one leading hound—or, better still, the fox—and for the fence at which he must be first, or be miserable. His best friend, crossing his vision at such a moment, is but a black hateful blotch, to be cut out and erased, or at the least to be wiped out of all significance. Such are certain men at certain times ; and such they certainly were as they burst through the dam of restraint that sought to hold them back on the slope of Gartree Hill on Friday. They started only one by one after the fox, but they rushed in a mad mob after the first hound, the latter flinging along gaily over three enclosures in the happy honour of having a Quorn field all to herself. The first early rush had been towards Great Dalby, but the presence of drain-diggers altered it at once to the Burton Flat. The pack dashed through the torrent as it bent, and with a tremendous scent carried a flying head across the smooth wet meadows over which the covert looks. Spreading right and left, the great field bustled and splashed as best they might in their wake, open easy timber prefacing the early part of the gallop, a wide cavernous boundary-fence then giving a still broader spread to the charging phalanx, and the deep sodden turf clinging with distressing tenacity to every plunging hoof. How desperately, wildly, a field was crushing forward, that usually boasts of riding fairer than any Hunt in England, might have been gleaned by a glance along that single wide fence. Men rose at it pocket to pocket, lit on each other's heels, and even rolled over one another on the farther bank. Beyond this again the play opened out rapidly. But a well-known quick-set-and-double post-and-rails tempted only one candidate, Mr. Chandos-Pole, who at once took upon himself the responsibility of simplifying the unnecessary complication.

Approaching the subject with his customary vigour, he brought all his weight to bear against such needless exaggeration of detail, reduced the strongest arguments of the other side to shreds, and passed quietly on his way. The main current of pursuers, meanwhile, parted right and left, for adjacent gates, and rose the hill for Leesthorpe in two divisions. Never was less flippancy displayed than at the little oxer on the upward slope. It was bent, doubled, and finally broken, as if every horse had lost the use of his hindlegs—and this the result of only twelve minutes' galloping, plus a month's frost! But the result was not confined to horseflesh. The *corpus vile* and *ulpine* was just as weak and out of condition. While you were thinking how best to frame to your groom your sentiments as to the absolute unfitness of the beast on which he had sent you out to break your neck (and surely when a hundred grooms are out of place, his master's life should at least be some little matter of care to the one who is lucky enough to be receiving pay to be pitched into)—all this while poor Reynard was cursing the ease with which he had found rats ready to hand, and the well-fed indolence in which he had spent the weeks past. You and I, reader, may have looked rosy on our unwonted exertions, and scarcely thrown as much muscle into our saddle-grip as a beaten horse demands; but then we had neither a long and pitiless pair of spurs into our ribs, nor a hungry pack yelling in our ears, to enforce the fell consequence of frost and self-indulgence. So for once one and all of us could outstay our horses, and many of us found we had already done so ere the hill-top was reached. But our fox had fortunately been only too glad to turn into the sheltering spinney of Wheat Hills, there to quiet his own panting sides. Little rest, though, he found there. The covert was hotter, and the scent as keen as outside; the din was terrific, as hounds spun their quarry about the plantation; and very soon he issued forth with the clamouring pack at his heels, and a shepherd dog running him closer still. Indeed, it looked a hundred to one against the fox, and ten to one on the colley.

However, Reynard just beat him to the first fence, and so saved his brush handsomely. The interference of the shepherd dog probably served him rather than hounds, for in the next few fields he got farther ahead of them, and somewhere soon he set a substitute going in his place. Except as affecting the chances of a kill, previously so imminent, the latter answered all purposes, for he set his head straight across the open, and led them smartly onwards by Berry Gorse and across the valley to the left of Stapleford. Not the worst of the run was the part that embraced the broad grass fields up to the railway. Hounds then crossed the line for a brief while, turned alongside it again to the right to Saxby Station, and were next carried on to a holloa towards the village of Freeby. Thus, starting in the Quorn country, they now left the Cottesmore, to embark upon that of the Belvoir. But the best of the sport was already over, though pursuit was prosecuted for a long time to come, till Newman's Gorse and Freeby Wood had been run through, and hounds at length bayed over the earth in the former covert. This was about two hours after the first crash from Gartree Hill, the initial half-hour being the cream of the run, and that being about the tether of two-thirds of the horses as far as pleasant riding was concerned.

DANCE AND DISASTER.

TILL an hour almost beyond the term "small," in the morning of Friday, Feb. 11, the Shire in question joined hands with its sister of Northampton, to bring off the annual United Counties Ball at Market Harboro'. The two then, having danced their fill, and snatched their forty winks, set out together to meet the Pytchley at Oxendon, smoothing their countenances as if neither schottische nor champagne had had aught to do with the night before. To describe a ball is not the province of a hunting correspondent. The

Harboro' Ball, though, is a yearly cheerful gathering of hunting people, with their wives, daughters, diamonds, matchmaking, lovemaking, and merrymaking ; and it forms a very important item in the winter calendar of the Shires. Does it not, moreover, mark for us the passage and effects of time (whether for better or for worse) more clearly and prominently than any other gauge to which our local society is subject ? It is here that we look to note, year by year, who has grown old, who has grown up, who is fair, and who has become fat. It is here we ask ourselves with wonder if the slender maid, whose first triumphant débüt was on these very boards (no, it was stone, with drugget loosely stretched over corn dust, in those days), exists to-night in the buxom matron now taking her third turn at supper. It is here we mark the gay young soldier to have become the grey-haired veteran, the rosy and youthful fox-hunter to have bloomed into the well-waistcoated grower of turnips and shorthorns. A generation is but a little thing after all, beautiful in its budding, comfortable and self-appreciative in its full bloom, and awakening to dependence on its own resources only in its fading age. We scarcely like to own that a term of years has passed for ourselves ; but, Heavens, the mark is very palpable in our contemporaries ! How many Harboro' Balls should men have seen to justify them in appearing with heads grizzled or bald—how many to acknowledge a grown-up daughter ? They brave the lapse of time unflinchingly, perhaps, when hatted and set going with hounds, though they don't ride bad-shouldered ones with careless indifference nowadays, and they generally know their horse can jump timber before they ask him to do it. But they don't foot it as lightly as when first they jingled their spurs, and, somehow, the number of their dance is more often a matter of mistake than it used to be. Well, but Harboro' was well done, and well attended. The glitter of diamonds was, perhaps, scarcely as remarkable as usual. But the dresses were as striking to the uninitiated male as ever, and no doubt as ample a subject for next day's converse and comparison for the

more observant sex ; of a truth, they could lay claim to the epithet of ample on few other grounds.

Oxendon is a cross-road meet, and Waterloo Gorse a little covert. So it will be taken without contradiction that the former was crowded and the latter surrounded long before operations commenced. Mr. Langham gave till twelve o'clock as grace to the ball-goers ; and, as Oxendon is but two miles from Market Harboro', and great numbers of them had encamped close to the scene of action overnight, they received every possible indulgence towards making their self-appointed task an easy one. Goodall had brought out the "middle pack," and directly they were in covert they set their fox afoot. But in the dense thorn-thicket he could creep about as he pleased, leaving apparently no sign of his passing ; in fact, he might have been there now had he chosen to remain. But he was quite game for a spin over the country, and probably will be again. The crowd drove him back once, if not twice, at his old point along the railway bank. But he fairly cut his way through them at last, and threaded the village of Oxendon to start with. Half the horsemen struck at once into the road above the covert, there to witness, or commingle in, a catastrophe as startling and terrifying as is often to be witnessed. Down the broad lane leading into Oxendon Village rushed a stream of horsemen six deep, and galloping twice as fast through their midst tore a dog-cart. In it sat a young lady, clinging convulsively to the seat, while the reins dangled about the horse's legs, and the trap swung hither and thither in its wild career. Pale, silent, and helpless, she swept past, before those upon whom she dashed had time to learn the meaning of the cries, "Look out ! " "Stop the horse ! " &c., &c. Grazing the flank of one steed, shying off from another, she shot the rapids safely through a marvellous succession of hairbreadth 'scapes, till, with a whirl and a crash that thrilled through the heart of every onlooker, the cart bumped against a galloping horse, turned a somersault in the air, and lit overturned, with its freight apparently under it. By the happiest luck in the

world the catastrophe came exactly where a joining lane threw a corner of muddy turf almost into the middle of the road, to receive the hapless lady with no further hurt than the terrible fright. But this was not all. Simultaneously with the crash of the runaway horse and cart, two other horses came tearing down, as only madly-frightened horses can. The one carried nothing but saddle and flapping stirrup-leathers; its rider gone, but a shaft-mark in its quarter, from which blood spurted at each stride like water to the stroke of a pump. The other bore its rider wildly down the steep incline, to dash him in a heap against the first cottage wall. Yet the only fatal casualty was the shaft-pierced steed, though the combination of accident was horrible, and such as, happily, seldom attends the hunting-field. Nerves had scarcely recovered, though, before Captain Hunt scrambled up from a broken-backed horse. Altogether, it was a bad day for the timid.

But, to turn from what was fearful, let us go to what was bright and amusing—the few minutes from Waterloo Gorse, when at last their fox could be forced from a bad-scenting covert, and a smart, driving pack of hounds were away to their own sparkling music. From Waterloo Gorse to Farndon is but a short distance, easily gone by road, but very stirring by way of the fields alongside. The fences are as big as the county of grazing Northamptonshire owns. But the burst was too brief to dwell upon, far too brief to satisfy. Then the order came for Althorpe Thorns, and a field of four hundred followed like lambs to a narrow turf bridge below the covert. The bridge not unnaturally succumbed, and three-fourths of the following never even had the satisfaction of seeing the covert drawn. Hounds went gaily away from it at once, and over a wide hilly country ran hard for the next twenty minutes to Sibbertoft and the Hothorpe Hills. Dipping from these again they slipped quickly across the valley to Bosworth Hall, to hunt prettily back to the line of hills and on to Sulby, where they killed, almost immediately after starting their fox forward from the gorse. What more you saw depended on your

distance from home, and whether you were a one or two-horse man for the day, the field thinning considerably at this period. Snow flakes were still falling lightly, as they had been doing since morning, though they appeared to influence scent for the better rather than for the worse.

SHARP MOMENTS.

THE Quorn Friday of February 18 was just saved by a brilliant little burst in the late afternoon. It was a very brief experience, but a bright sharp episode, such as stamps itself in clean and deeply cut outline on the memory. It passed like the rush of a whirlwind, but remains in mind as if all the thrill and excitement were still in being. A dull flat morning had been passed in tracking the footsteps of an Ashby Pastures' fox, whose ingenuity in trailing his followers over mile after mile of gluey plough was the only admirable part of the pursuit. I have hunted a certain number of years in the Quorn country, but never before conceived that there could be so many acres under cultivation. The field was a very large one, of quality and intent quite in keeping with a meet at Thorpe Satchville in early spring, and they got heartily tired of dragging about the country on a cold line, long before the run was announced to be at an end. By this time they were at Keyham, and soon afterwards they saw the Barkby Thorpe Spinnies drawn blank. Hounds had already run through Barkby Holt, besides having slipped their field from thence only the evening before, in a hot scurry to Scrauptoft. But Mr. Nuttall insisted they would still find, if they would but return to try. Accordingly the pack were drawing the covert again at a quarter past three; and at half past their tongues were going freely to announce the wished-for news. Not too much scent in covert, either.

They could never get up a crash; and they followed their fox rather than drove him. But the Holt is a right good place to view a fox from quarter to quarter, and an easy place in which to move about with hounds, if only you are not deterred

by the trifle of deep deep rides. Tally-ho-Over at one point; a false start from covert at another; two circles round the little wood—and twenty men are listening with bated breath close to the exit on the Gaddesby side; while hounds are working their way through the thicket close by, and the rest of the field are posted at chosen spots in and around the covert. *Huic Away!* *Huic Away!!* He has gone without being viewed. Hounds are away, and we shall all be left behind as yesterday. The thought is maddening; and the rush for the gateway is as fierce as the scramble from a church on fire. Into the muddy lane. Out beyond into the open grass field that borders the Gorse. Not a hound in sight; but Mr. William Chaplin, hat in air, riding down to the gate in the opposite fence. The Master's trumpet sounds sonorously, and Firr and a considerable following come streaming from the main ride. Ah, how lucky, a gate so exactly placed—and a good fellow who will just have opened it by the time we can reach it to gallop through. Oh dear, oh dear! what a pace hounds must be going! what idiots were we to be standing still! Eh! what!! *Locked*—by all that's holy! The fence is a ruffianly one, and horses have been pulled out of their stride. No help for it. Mr. Harter whips round to fly the hairy ditch and sturdy rails, quickly followed by Mr. Barclay and Mr. Chaplin, while Firr springs over parallel to them, and they light into the field just in time to see Phantasy's white stern whisking through the next fence in pursuit. Rough ridge and furrow, forty acres of anthills—is this a field for making up ground? You will do better by catching the headland, though it does carry you off to the right. Strong-timbered fences, chasing pace, a horse that is fit—isn't this life and fun? Blood of man and heart of horse are beating stroke for stroke. Each stride is a responsive effort, each jump is jointly-timed action. No fear of mistake or fall while the enthusiasm is thus mutual, the object in common. This is why a steeple-chaser jumps so freely and faultlessly. He is never baulked by, but works ever in confidence with his rider. There is no moment of

hesitation now as the left division springs the Queniboro' brook in the open field, while the right pushes through a strong bullfinch into the Croxton Lane, takes the rails out at a stand, and strikes the brook at a bridge. It is only at the second ridge beyond that Mr. Harter and Firr race up to the pack as they hover a moment at a wheatfield. Another second, they are over the Queniboro' and Tilton turnpike, and set going again amid the most closely-fenced and intricate country in the Hunt. In the place of the former broad pastures come narrow dairy meadows, with gaunt great fences only to be pierced here and there. The pack are raking onwards, and momentarily there is more danger of losing them. Turning and twisting here and there, the leaders jump in and out to keep on terms; and as hounds dash through a narrow plantation short of Gaddesby, one and all of them are pounded. Mr. Brocklehurst in vain attempts to force a direct course; the others (among whom, besides the above, are Mr. J. Behrens, Captain Smith, Lord Henry Vane Tempest, and one or two others) push their way into the plantation at a corner, wind through a labyrinth of trees, and clatter out over a rail beyond, while Mr. Peake makes use of a stile and footboard in the side fence adjoining. A further difficulty comes next in the bottom, over which hounds have turned suddenly for Barsby. There is a vast noise of cracking timber, much struggling and "Come-up"-ing, and a way is made. Fences every fifty yards, stiffly built, strongly bound, horses shortening their stride, bullfinches spoiling shaven features—one object only in view, to get on somehow. Ah, it is too short, very sweet—an excitement worth living for. Who says that a ride ought not to constitute part of foxhunting? Let such go to harriers, leaving us the merry Quorn pack, and a scrambling burst from Barkby Holt! Yet it had been better for us and poor Reynard that that water-fed drain by Barsby had not held out a false sanctuary. It put an end to our gallop and an end to his troubles! Tear him and eat him, old fellows! Peace to his manes! and a glass to-night to foxhunting.

SNOW SKIRMISHING.

THE Quorn do not often commit themselves to the eccentricity of hunting in the snow; but they could scarcely help it, or have regretted it, on Friday, February 25. Snow had been on the ground all the week, protecting the soil from the slight frosts which nightly hardened the roads, to be softened again by each day's sun. Thus, beyond a crisp white covering, the turf rode pretty much as usual, the ditches were clear, and the roads could do no harm to hounds' feet, when once the sun had shown itself. Men had flocked into Gaddesby from all quarters, declaring they had cantered across the fields in perfect comfort. Many had even come in the full assurance of pink and leathers. Hounds were there to time; the Master had slept on the spot, and was nothing loth; and, accordingly, to the delight of both staff and outsiders, the order was given for Ashby Pastures shortly before midday. Horses kicked the snowballs gaily from their feet as they frisked across the sward from the Hall; and it was obvious that in going fast the peril lay rather in the missiles of your friends than in any difficulty of your horse to keep his feet.

That fox in Ashby Pastures must have been looking out of the gate, so ready was he for the coming of hounds, and so instantly did they hail his presence. He should have been a good one; but his was only a homely mind. He shuffled out of their way at the moment, rather than lose the number of his berth, as the sailors put it. But to hurry across to Thorpe Trussells was his first idea. To get back again was his second.

The afternoon, however, set things going to a much better tune. From one of the Gaddesby plantations (that abutting on the Queniboro' Spinney) a brisk fox was off like a bolt, over the road, and through the covert beyond—pointing for South Croxton just long enough, possibly, to delude you away from the bridge that bears honour to Her Ladyship of Stamford.

For the Queniboro' brook, easy in some places, is here a deep cut undercurrent, winding its sluggish way between high rotten banks, with overhanging bushes blocking many of the most desirable points. In a word, the facilities it presents for getting into it are held quite on a par by the difficulties of getting out—and before the bridge was built both used to be made patent almost every week.

There was little thought of the snow now—though under a change of wind it was melting fast and balling hard, and the snowballs flew about dangerously as the field swept over the meadows to Barkby Holt. In spite of doubts and drawbacks there must have been some seventy or eighty horsemen out, at one time or another of the day. Melton was represented by every degree of attire, from complete orthodoxy to walking trousers, the latter being the undress of a party of disbelievers on hacks, who yet had not been able to refrain from keeping their heads towards the meet. So there was quite a field of riders with hounds, as the latter entered the Holt, while the former foolishly galloped round to anticipate an exit on the other side. Thus as hounds twisted short in covert with either their own fox or a fresh one, only Captain O'Neal was there to leave with them on the Barkby side—when with fresh vigour they struck forth again, almost in the direction from which they had come. All that could now be seen by the cavalcade toiling in the immediate wake of the huntsman was a bevy of dark spots flitting over the snow in the distance—like gulls under a storm cloud and over a bright sea—and a grey steed carrying a mufti-clad figure over fence after fence. Thus they pursued over one of the Barkby Lanes and into the Queniboro' Valley beyond. Here one and all pulled up short at a single stout and high rail fixed firmly in a greasy gateway. There were hoof-marks up to it, and hoof-marks beyond—and the Captain was on for'ard. So proof was not wanting that it was jumpable. Yet there was a general pull-up; and a howling appeal to a venerable labourer to pull it down. The old man fumbled hard at the offensive barrier, but not a bit would it

give. A bold youth of the party then charged rail and old man together—kneed the one, and frightened the other out of his few remaining senses, lit on his horse's head as that touched the ground, and, after half a minute's picturesque struggling, resumed his seat again. One other followed his lead with equal success, but with some less poetry of action ; and Providence then directed the failing hearts of the others to a gated sheep-pen in the adjacent corner. Meanwhile the grey and the hounds had crossed the brook by a ford, reached Queniboro' Spinney, and were moving on for South Croxton, when at length huntsman and field reached them—some twenty-five minutes from the find.

Now the pace was slackening—as pace always does slacken after the first burst (in all but most exceptional instances)—proving one of two things: either that a fox goes much faster than hounds, or that the scent of a fresh fox is much stronger than that of one that has stood some time before hounds. Putting aside the difficulties that a beaten fox creates by doubling and turning, what is the explanation, men of knowledge and experience? For you will scarcely gainsay me in the assertion that the heat of a chase is in its earlier stage, and scent more often languishes than freshens as pursuit goes on.

But of the Quorn fox—or foxes—on the occasion in point. They ran him up to where a drunkard in a smock frock was cooling head and heels on a stile in preference to drinking his time and earnings completely out in the public of South Croxton adjoining (fact, not figure, this). Drunkard of course had interfered with the fox; but the latter had still gone on, and had been seen along the Tilton road. Unfortunately, before his line could be recovered a new fox was among the rearmost horsemen, and shriek and scream and yell insisted on the huntsman's return. Very loth he at length assented, with the consequence that a new edition of a run was created, which wasted itself at length in a return journey by Barsby, and to no definite end. A holloa on a sinking fox is often a halleluia in the ears of a huntsman ; but holloas, ninety-nine

times out of a hundred, are deceit and destruction—a sentiment not culling verbatim, but for all that a mere repetition of what has been written strongly by every pen of any worth in hunting literature, and what is more difficult than aught else to realise and receive in its fullest sense.

“Always a run on Ash-Wednesday” has grown into a proverb at Melton. There never was less chance of its being verified than this year—with ten days’ snow on the ground, a sharp frost overnight, and a fresh fall in the early morn. But it came off, nevertheless, and the Belvoir served up their annual dish in as good form as ever. They brought out their beautiful “big pack” to show the foreigners; for, in spite of weather and appearances, there were men from every county, almost from every country—dukes, counts, lords of every degree, and “jolly huntsmen” of every sort and size. The meet was a very nominal 12.30; and due allowance, besides, was given for any length of journey, or even of discourse for those who had minded to avail themselves. Atherstone, Meynell, South Notts, Pytchley, Quorn, Cottesmore, Sir Bache Cunard’s, and Belvoir of course, were all represented in more or less strength. Mr. Rolleston was there with the laurels of his great Lowdham run fresh upon him; Goodall had come over from the scene of his many recent successes, for a day with his former chief; and, from far and near, train and carriage and hack had assisted to pour numbers into the white desert of Croxton Park. Six inches of snow! What a prospect! Still everyone undauntedly held on. Carriages ploughed through the deep dragging mass. Horsemen trotted forward, all gaily attired and wearing the smile of certainty and content. In ordinary years we should have been tramping about home in shooting-boots and gaiters, and using language expressive. Now amid snow and frost we are hunting and smiling, and even enjoying ourselves. Baffin’s Bay for the summer, and a pack to hunt the Polar fox, will be our next move—and if hounds can draw sledges there, they should be able to hunt without harm to themselves. Rough riding, though, I fancy—unless a reindeer be a fair mo~~gnt.~~

But this by the way—only suggested by bad weather, and by the thought of possible land-trespass-enactments in the future of this sad century. *Of course* hounds were at the meet, and it was meant they should hunt “Mr. Burbage’s Covert”—so trot back, Meltonians, and be thankful. Two foxes away for the Quorn country—time, somewhere about 2.15. One bore right, the other left; and hounds could not quite start upon either. In fact, from various information they meandered between the two. Gillard kept his temper, and his head, under all provocation, and was rewarded by one of the two foxes being headed across him, enabling him to make a fair start after all. Disappointment was at once turned to delight as the pack broke across the scent and flung themselves breast-high along it. This fox had been headed and holloaed at, but he had left his mark behind, and over the grass to Burton Lazars they spun along charmingly. (I had forgotten to note that the snow lay but sparsely anywhere here, though we had tramped through many a mile of white-sheeting to reach such a comforting prospect.) Instead of snow there was a sea of mud and water. Witness that lane above Captain Ashton’s new house. But we look for good grass and firm roads here next year, please. Yet over plough and dirt the scent held good, and we got on to better ground soon. What better than the Great Dalby lordship? And so with stirring fun we came to Gartree Hill—five-and-thirty minutes from the first practical note outside covert. But not half done with the Quorn country yet. The whip holloaed his fox away for Burton, and in the next fifteen minutes through the deep ground only the hounds were in it. A check in the Sandy Lane, near Melton, and afterwards a good quick hunt leftward and back by Great Dalby, nearly to Ashby Pastures, and through Thorpe Trussells. One hour and twenty-five minutes up to this: all beautiful hound work: huntsman hard and keen and quiet: ground deep as darkness, scent first-rate, and grief profound and harmless—this is the epitome. Two foxes ahead now, and little doubt of a recent change. This

spoilt it for the working staff, if not for us idlers, who, having amused ourselves, went home pleased enough. The run had been almost a double ring, had included both bad country and good, but had been full of spirit and amusement.

The verdict on the season 1880-81 has already been passed. Not even three final weeks of uninterrupted sport would now avail to redeem it. It has been, with us, a bad, broken season—"the worst on record," say the veterans. Long and frequent interruptions, continual want of scent, and wild uncomfortable weather, have signalised it as the least pleasurable winter of, at all events, the decade. There are one or two among us who have made the present season their first experience of Leicestershire. Let us hope they will not frame their opinion of the country from what they have now seen, or no doubt their first experience will be also their last, and they will move elsewhere, disappointed and incredulous.

A LINK WITH THE PAST.

A GALLOP from John o' Gaunt has come as a link with the past. Time was when we looked upon it as our right by custom, expected it as belonging to the proper order of things, and felt aggrieved if it failed to come off quite once a month. From John o' Gaunt to Burrough Hill, or the Punchbowl—twenty to twenty-five minutes over the Twyford Vale. Could anything beat it for country or delight? Not so very long ago, either—not a dozen years, even. And yet, when in memory we sweep away the curtain of railway embankment, and throw open that beautiful plain of broad pasturage once again, the most prominent figures are not all to be found in our present hunting-field. Even Fir's horn had scarcely woken Leicestershire then. Looking back to that bright succession of merry bursts, I can still see MacBride issuing bedraggled from the Marfield Brook without cap or horn—the good grey (afterwards ridden by poor Major Whyte Melville in Gloucestershire—and

still, I believe, alive) shrouded in black mud as he laboured on in pursuit. I can still see Mr. Corbett-Holland popping out from behind a hedge-row to take up the running on the safe side of this Marfield Brook. There was no bridge in those days, and the wind was blowing straight for the Vale! I can see the Earl galloping a little faster and much quieter than anyone else—Sir Frederick Johnstone and Captain Coventry racing for the Twyford Brook—and Mr. Powell, both spurs in for an oxer that nothing but old Burgundy could have got even half over.

Now let me explain how John o' Gaunt is now situated; and then tell in a few words what happened on Friday—March the 18th the date. John o' Gaunt is a square blackthorn covert backed at the distance of a mile or two by the Cottesmore woodlands of Tilton, Skeffington, *et hoc genus omne*. Looking northwards it faces that perfect undulating vale reaching to Burrough, stretching on the left hand to Ashby and Thorpe Satchville, on the right to Owston and Somerby, and intersected by the two little streams above mentioned. But, to shut off this face, there has been for some years past an irresistible power at work—the progressive and devastating *Deus ex machinâ* of steam and iron: and not only is one railway embankment now regularly carrying its noisy freights past the sacred ground, but a kind of double junction is being reared and created at the very covertsides! Yet, in spite of all this, our gallop came off as merrily as of old—so what need to lament the past or mourn over the present?

The Quorn had met at Keyham. I will take it for granted that you have at some time or other attended a spring meet at Keyham, and had an opportunity of making yourself acquainted with its average size and composition. Thus I need only write that it was much as usual—or, perhaps, a little more so. The moiety of a positive summer day was then consumed in killing a bad fox from among the goodly number at the Coplow, and in strolling quietly on to John o' Gaunt—calling at Lord Moreton's covert by the way.

The sun was still very hot and bright, but a cool breeze was

moving, as hounds spread out over the low cut stuff of which the Tilton side of the covert at present consists. *Tallyho-Over* sounded before they entered the thicker growth. Generally a good fox that finds himself. He's away at the bottom in another second. The gate is locked, but the whip soon cuts the Gordian knot with a hoist at the hinges. The pack have struck the line in covert and are bringing it through—to a point two hundred yards from where he has just been viewed stealing away. Their heads are up for a second as the huntsman gets clear; and they swing out to his horn in a moment—while the Master slips round them to bend their sweep within bounds. “The other side of the fence he has gone”—and the other side of the fence they drop on to it, with a gain of half a furlong. Through the gateway and on beyond, they glide out of view in a second. This gate, too, has a chain round it—for when did hounds last run this line? The left of the gate is fenced with high timber, the right with much more desirable wattle. Mr. Wade and his grey have no hesitation in selecting the former. Neither have the next pair; but the result in the latter instance is successful only as demonstrating to what extent a good ash rail can resist momentum and upset loose calculation. The gateway is crowded at once with hesitating, baffled material. The wattle is easy enough; but the timber is the point of dishonour, attracting open-mouthed, awesome attention. At last one sheep of the timorous flock by piteous bleating obtains the right of a cut at the lesser difficulty; and the flock streams over, making the way easier as it goes. A third locked gate, a third impossible (*hardly possible*) fence brings in another delay and a better chance for hounds. Now they are streaming over the new railway; and, before their following has dived under the adjoining bridge, are flitting away in that old happy direction that leads to twenty minutes of clear grass, the possibility of a cool ducking, and the certainty of a flying scent. If hounds have started well, they improve their terms as they go. They are three hundred yards to the good of Firr, as he slips down the bank

to make his way quietly over the Marfield brook, where the current narrows and a post-and-rail adorns its brink (easy places always offer themselves to a man who confidently fides only for hounds). Oh, such baulking, bothering, and scrambling now. Everybody in everybody else's way; many men disinclined to jump till they have assured themselves which is the nicer place; and most horses asking for still a little more time to think. Hold up, sir! Well recovered! Two inches less spring—and you would have followed your hind legs backwards into water! And you have left the bank broken—and the brook wider—for us by quite two feet. The hounds are disappearing over the brow, before the huntsman is half-way up the great grass field and a scattered dozen have crossed the water after him. On in hot pursuit of the pack for another mile or so of fine turf and pleasant fences. Little change of position in this time; but the lot closing up quickly as hounds waver a second on the only morsel of plough encountered in the gallop. Mr. Wade, Mr. Johnson, Captain O'Neal, Lord Manners, Mr. Cecil Chaplin, Mr. Brooks, and Captain Townshend from the Atherstone, Lord Grey de Wilton, Captains Boyce and Candy—these were some of the vanguard, in the earliest, quickest part of the burst. Hounds of themselves set things forward again in a trice; and swoop down upon the second trial in the line—the Twyford Brook. But this, by the same happy accident that had discounted the dangers of the Marfield stream, is struck at a point where it, too, is the mildest of obstacles. So not a single coat is wetted, in a journey which has often found a ducking for fifty. Rising the hill side to the left of Burrough Village, another half-moment's hesitation occurs. Their fox has dodged for fifty yards along a dusty road, and the pack fling across the line unable at first to make it good. Mr. Coupland is there to check the pressing field; and a heap of praise is due to the huntsman for the quiet, clever way in which he helps hounds forward without getting their heads up. Thus, with no practical loss of ground, the run goes on over the hill, crossing it at a point above the

Melton Steeplechase Course—and with this beautiful arena in front there seems plenty more fun in prospect. But Reynard is blown by the pace, and beat by the heat. He turns back from the valley almost as he enters it, and seeks refuge in the valley of Burrough—twenty minutes from the start. In five minutes more he is stiff and stark. Hounds lunch on him, and turn for home.

With lambs running about in every field, with the new grass shooting up on the southern slope of every hill, with spring making patchwork of our horses' coats, the buds appearing in every hedgerow, and the dust from road and fallow powdering every glistening hat—this cheery little gallop was more than we could hope for, all that we could wish. And is not a bit of foxhunting like this a set-off against any week of worry, against a world of small vexation?

A STRANGER IN THE LAND.

IN this almost final week we hunted amid sunshine and snow, cold winds and hot dust—sometimes without an atom of scent or a particle of sport, at others with success quite unexpected.

Friday, March 25, the Quorn at Beeby—the wickedest weather and the worst scent of all this sinful season. The same cold blast was blowing from the west—more wildly than it had blown through the week. It was a matter of physical courage to leave the house at all—while moral courage had to be called into play to condone the billycock and covert-coat that, however incompatible with a Quorn Friday, were absolute essentials in support of a battle with the fierce elements. Sleet and snow made the day their own, and declined any sympathy with the sport which we consider worthy of all our time and all the money we can throw into it. Many foxes, again, at the Coplow. Three fields, and a dead loss of scent. Still worse from John o' Gaunt. Fox broke, with hounds out in a moment. Latter crossed his line twice

in the first hundred yards. Huge excitement: a rampant exodus of horsemen: and only a faint whimper in the next half hour. Black clouds driven down the wind: icy particles stinging the pupils of your eyes: shivering misery. A vixen at Barkby Holt. Home to growl at the fireside. Hunting very expensive amusement. Very silly to be so infatuated. Groom in for orders. Bound to be a run to-morrow.

If Friday was a day of comfortless inaction, Saturday was one of sunny incident. The snow storms had exhausted themselves during the night, dealing out a heavy fall at Belvoir Castle, a thick sprinkling at Melton. Thus, when the sun was at its meridian, Meltonians were riding to the meet through a clean country, while at the kennels the hunt servants long thought themselves weather-bound. But things were set right in course of time, and the whole party moved off to Mr. Burbage's covert, under the soothing influence of a north wind (for in the waywardness of our climate, the change of wind from west to north at once brought warmth with it).

About a mile from the city of Melton Mowbray lies Mr. Burbage's covert—a blackthorn stronghold in a bend of the Wreake. A ford gives an exit from it on the south; a railway crosses its northern face. Add to these details of position that the rising ground beyond the railway is always covered with footpeople whenever a whisper is abroad that the covert is to be drawn, and you will understand that a fox and his followers have frequent difficulties to contend with. To-day was an instance very much in point.

While hounds were in covert, the field as usual edged closely up to the gate at its corner with a view to the ford beyond. The keenest spectator of all was the veteran owner; who, now able to join the sport no longer except on wheels, had driven down to view a fox away. It was a sight almost touching to watch the keen unselfish interest of one who for so many years took active and prominent part in the vigorous pleasures of fox-hunting—an interest now confined to providing sport for younger men. It might indeed have taught a sceptic to think

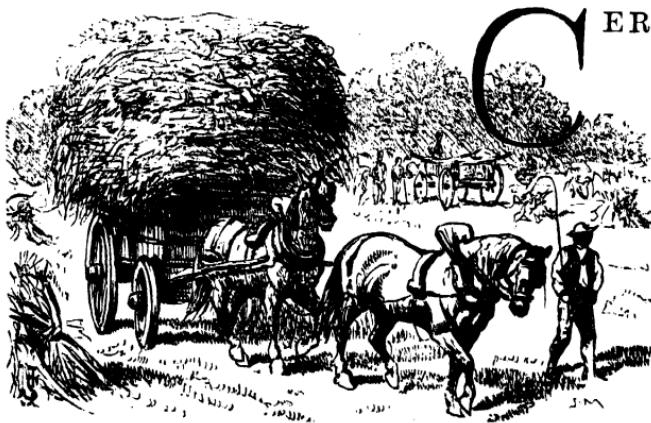
well of human nature, to note the delight of the old and crippled foxhunter, as hounds were cheered out of covert and in full cry swept across the meadow in front of him. I believe that, as three hundred other younger and halier men set off to enjoy themselves, he experienced a pleasure as genuine as, and certainly more generous than, in past years he has gathered from many a good run in which he has held his own with the best. May his days yet be many, and may we learn to grow old like him !

One broad meadow alone intervenes between the covert and the railway, and along the bank of the river till the stream runs at right angles under the line. The fox of to-day scurried across this meadow straight for the railway, but just before reaching it swam the river and struck back over the country in the old direction of Ashby Pastures and the Quorn country. Thus he had taken us away from the ford, and left the railway and its bridge as the best apparent medium for following him over the water. There used to be another practicable ford somewhere in this corner. There may be still, but nobody felt inclined now to plunge in on chance ; and so one and all made for the railway, and crowded into it like mice into a wire trap. No, not all ; for Lord Grey de Wilton and Captain Boyce grasped the situation at once, doubled back through the main ford, and struck in with hounds in the country beyond sooner than almost any of the self-caged ones. For, while the pack dashed off with the greatest vigour on the line of their fox, the hapless beings who had committed themselves to the railway were the victims of unforeseen complications. The "track," as our Transatlantic cousins term it, happened to be just under repair, and material was piled and scattered over it in lavish confusion. Great wooden sleepers lay in a continued heap along the bank, from which we have often been able to spring easily over the side fence. Thinking that there must soon come a clear space whence jumping would be possible, the leaders blundered on over bundles of clanking iron pins, over bare and newly-fixed sleepers, and mounds of fresh-turned

gravel, burning to turn aside, but pent in among the *débris*, plunging despairingly onwards, but finding no chance of extrication. Hounds meantime were glancing forward at best pace, close at their fox with a burning scent ; and the situation rapidly became desperate. Mr. Mackeson alone (a visitor in a strange land) had sufficient quickness of thought and action to clamber over the heaps of sleepers immediately he found himself on the right side of the river, and to brush over the girding fence. Followed by Wells, the first whip, he rode nearest in the line of hounds, though a flight of timber brought him on to his hat, by the way. However, the young soldier had quite the best of it in this, his maiden essay among the Meltonians. Mr. Harter was the unhappy pioneer down the line, and he and Lord Henry Vane Tempest, Captain Candy, and Mrs. Sloane-Stanley (who, I may be forgiven for saying, has ridden brilliantly through many of the best gallops of late weeks) were the first to extricate themselves—some few others also clearing themselves from the trap by a plunge over the timber heaps and jagged fence alongside. A lady and a collar-boned sportsman, with his arm in a sling, had alone been posted on the other bank of the river ; and these trotted on to keep hounds in sight as long as they could. For the others, it was ludicrous to note how every one was riding in the dark, among the small enclosures and tall fences between Melton and Burton, with the sun in their eyes and not a hound in view. Those from the left rode their hardest across the line of hounds to the right, and *vice versa*, the two sections crossing each other like a pair of scissors. Not till the Melton-and-Oakham road did they really drop on the pack. In two fields more they were in what is known as the Sandy Lane. Down this they whisked for half a mile, turned into the fields again towards Sanham, and at the end of fifteen minutes five or six men saw hounds roll their fox over in the open. It was a queer, rough scramble ; but if pace is any merit, and big fences any pleasure, then it had much to enhance it.

SEASON 1881-82.

HARVEST-TIME.



CERTAINLY,
the leaf
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off the
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fields—
but the
w o r k

that hound and horn have already found to do has been fully as exciting, twice as health-giving, as the other sport ushered in by October with beater and spaniel. A hot corner has its charms; but a cool corner, with the last cub fled, and the Master's order just uttered "Let them go after him" is better still on a fresh morning—when the ground is fit to ride, when a young horse is fretting for action, and a man would still fancy himself young.

Call it cubhunting or call it what you like, there will be few merrier mornings before Christmas than that of the Quorn on the last day of September. A small field, a rare scent, and two smart gallops over the best of grass—what more is wanted to make up a day's sport? Could men ride to it? Yes, and thrust and hustle and skirt as fast as hounds could take them—for there was room and choice of place for every one; none

of the summer wire came in the way ; where the hedges were too big there was always the “ bit of timber in the corner,” and, where the timber was not to their liking, generally a gate within reach. The morning was bright and hot as if harvest were just to begin ; and most of the horses were woolly as unclipped wethers. But the long grass reeked with cold dew ; the turf was saturated with recent rain, and all nature was more luxuriant and fresh than at any period of the summer. No wonder there was a scent—over which hounds should revel, and horses melt into sobs and soapsuds. At eight o’clock the pack was basking in the sunshine at Gaddesby Hall—scarcely anybody with them but the staff. At 8.45 they were in Queniborough Spinney, the little road-side covert that lies opposite Barkby Holt, and above Mr. Cheney’s nice young coverts. Everybody chooses his own time to start cubhunting ; and there had been some little misapprehension as to the rendezvous. At any rate, there were not a score of lookers-on when a brace of lusty cubs romped across the road for the Gaddesby Spinnies. Sudden silence in the clamour told that hounds had no other line in covert ; so they were thrown over the road before many seconds had gone. Down the slope and through the first of the Spinnies they flung. Away below, amid the “ stooks ” of fresh-cut barley. A locked and rotten gate, or a still more rotten post-and-rails beside it, made, perhaps, the first fence of the season—almost always obligatory as a youngster’s dip from a bathing machine. The first chill over, blood warmed and instinct glued itself once again to the doings of the spotted beauties. Headstrong and lashing were the old ladies of the pack—tasting freedom and a driving scent. Not fifty yards too far, though, did they swing in their galloping cast. No crowd to choke the green lane now : and, rounding into it, they caught the line where Reynards (young or old) had threaded ; and now they would teach the puppies what grass and gaiety mean. Under the dazzling sunshine and over the sparkling dew—across the meadows for Barsby. Moderate fences seemed terribly big, for we’d little

confidence in ourselves as yet, and less still in the horse we had never crossed till to-day. But the ditches were, luckily, mostly beyond the binders ; the new purchase was soon found to know quite as much as his rider ; and we could squeeze his fat sides as if we had never felt funk. The subtle waters of the Ashby and Gaddesby brook were quickly and comfortably forded ; and then it was uphill, big grass fields, and follow-my-leader—the honour and office of gap-maker falling by universal accord to the trumpet-major. Twenty minutes thus ; and, frothing, panting, and labouring, we reached Ashby Pastures. Fox, hounds, and huntsmen were all in the road together on the far side of the covert. A turn back launched them again into the open—this time alone. The next half-hour was spent, by the field looking for something to ride after, and by the hunt officials in getting a divided pack together ; Firr in the meantime having, with half the pack, followed a fox over miles of open country by himself in the Kirby and Frisby direction.

The rest of the morning was all at, or from, the Gaddesby Spinnies. First, a taste of blood to whet the puppies' palates —then a healthy hearty scurry, that in November would have set the Meltonian after-dinner tongues rolling. "Hunting is never mentioned at a Melton dinner," wrote Mr. Appleby. In humility and shame I plead for my generation, suggesting only in defence that the Meltonian of earlier years either gave all his attention to his dinner, or had much more control of self than his successor of the present day. I am the more at a loss to understand the dictum—knowing the two facts, first, that the Waterford Meltonians were all sworn and agreed Tories, and could have had no political wrangles to sweeten discussion ; and, secondly, that they all lived in single happiness—till they had so far outrun the constable, or else bonneted him so often (*vide* old Melton prints)—that it became advisable to seek the alternative of respectable married existence, and its discursive field of argument.

But this gallop—and in plain, brief, fact. Well, there were

so many foxes about Gaddesby, that it appeared only a matter of which spinney it should be wherein to kill one. They made the death of one, and sought another for sport. Him they found on the slope through which they had run in the first early morn—and he broke *very* like a bold old fox. Not the worst moment in life is seeing hounds struggle and fight their way out to the scream. How keen are those rounded ears ! what an instinct must ever guide them to the exact point of exit ; what fierce, brave disregard of pain and obstacle must by each individual be exercised that he may be in time to take his part. To watch this at the end of a summer's hurtful inactivity is to feel like a fish thrown back into water—after a prolonged gasp on the bank.

Quornites know well the valley through which runs the Gaddesby brook—and they like it best when well mounted. The fences grow so lusty and stout that only odd holes and corners are fit to be approached with any confidence, even then. Happy is he who, or whose friend, knows the gates and bridle paths. Just now, too, when the hedges are gaudy and thick as the grass, and the rank pasturage grows up and over their ditches, he is the artist who can skirt (not skim) a country quickest. A ditch *towards him* he may take under compulsion—though he will flutter gaily over the leafy screen protecting its little pitfall beyond. He may even be on a timber jumper ; and take valour from beneath his saddle, when a stile tempts. But the rule now is Gates. Where there are no gates, Providence—as far as your trust dares take advantage. But horses are very sage at saving themselves, and consequently you. They care little for the coward on their back ; but for their own convenience they won't fall if they can help it. An easier country lies over the road towards Rearsby. Hounds then divided suddenly ; but were reunited on a hardrunning line that led within a few fields of Queniborough. Now they swung back to the left ; and, over the brook meadows, were scarcely to be kept in sight —while black bullfinches frowned and palisaded openings laughed the timid to scorn. The pace, too, was crushing

under a sun that broiled your nose, and made gross horseflesh to swelter and reel.

The young Reynard that had made so good a fight was also about wound up as he regained the spinney, whence he had first started—five-and-thirty minutes since, and never a check in the time. He wore his brush for ten minutes more; but only to crawl the little covert and take one short turn outside. *Who whoop* then sounded the end of a thorough day's sport. The field of to-day was, with the exception of three early Meltonians, purely local, and consisted of some fifty on horseback. It is a pleasure to note that among those riding to hounds was Miss Paget of Rearsby, whose terrible fall of last winter seems to have left few traces. Of the three hailing from Melton, one was Mr. Beaumont, who has returned from Australia with an undiminished love of foxhunting.

AUTUMN CONDITION.

WHAT do you say to forty-three minutes and a six-mile point over the grass! Is not that good enough for October? What would the crowd think of it in February? What, then, was it not worth to a little field now? “A pound a minute” is the proverbial estimate. But where could you go with forty-three pounds in your pocket, and buy one tenth part of the excitement and delight compressed into that ride with the Quorn?

Friday last, October 21st, was the date—and here are the details. The morning was thoroughly wet; and the field was of skeleton proportions. There were, in fact, only the following few, as far as my memory serves me—the Master and Miss Webster, Mr. Cheney, Miss Paget, Lord Lewis, Colonel Chipindall, Captain Campbell, Messrs. Beaumont, Parker, Pennington, J. Cradock, W. Markham, O. Paget, E. Miles, W. Martin, W. Miles, Wade, Watts, Carver, with a very small margin to be covered by the usual terminant etc.

The meet had again been Gaddesby: and the earlier part of the morning had been spent in following up the same fox that, a month before, had given us a first flutter across the country—from Mr. Cheney's new covert to Ashby Pastures. This time there was a split in the pack soon after starting; the edge was taken off the scent; and it was a half-hour's hunt instead of a twenty minutes' gallop.

Thus, somewhere about midday, the Hunt was back at what is known as Gaddesby Spinney, proper. As its name implies, this is a covert of only a few acres. But it is closely planted with privet, and carefully kept and tended withal. The place of all others from which to insure a burst—the certainty has never failed for the last year or two, since the spinney has grown to maturity.

Firr himself viewed Reynard away (no matter now whether cub or old customer). Thus the ladies all hustled out of covert almost before their fox was over the first field, with his head to Rearsby—and half the certainty was assured in a close quick start. Three choking bits of fresh-turned plough to commence with—then never a yard of dirty ground till the chase was ended. Horses could only trot through this; but hounds, too, were held back by its cold sticky surface. Once clear of it, they swept down towards the little boundary stream that runs between the parishes of Brooksbury and Gaddesby—and their fox took the opportunity to swing to the rightabout and make his point, in exactly the opposite direction to that forced upon him at starting. Now he stuck his head for Burrough on the Hill nearly in the teeth of the wind, left all the Quorn coverts on his left, and—once settled to his line—never bent his neck till he reached his goal. Along the brook-side above mentioned Mr. Pennington and the huntsman rode close to the now flying pack—little meadows and nice fences to be taken at galloping speed—and the same sort of riding (if you clung to the right of the little stream) all through the first hot and hurried ten minutes. 'Twould be impossible to have crammed more necessary jumping and better pace into

the time : and men and horses seemed half blown already. The ditches were blind ; but I saw no falls. I know one who saw stars ; and his best feature still wears an unhallowed hue—as of gin and bitters. Horse took an extra little stride to gather himself for timber beyond the woolly ditch, felt his hindlegs going in, and averted a fall only by throwing back his head into rider's hapless face. Rider, who has not had the gloves on for some time, shook his head sadly and savagely at the unaccustomed shock—and made me a free present of the incident to adorn my tale, bargaining only that the ignominy of his bloody nose should not be debited against him as obtained on landing *after* a jump. By this time the hounds had reached what is known as Mrs. Loy's House, above the village of Gaddesby ; and, threading the garden, crossed the road, on to the open fields beyond—while horsemen had to double round by the back yard, and pass the difficulties of a wire and locked gate as best they might. Watches were out as if a check had come ; and “ What a jolly ten minutes ! ” was on every tongue. While the run had in reality only just begun, we (poor simpletons) had quite taken it for granted that this was to be but one of the short merry scrambles we had so often seen over the same ground ; that we had been quite justified in taking every possible liberty with our horses ; and that a fat cub must by this time be nearly burst up. Getting on to the grass again, we were quickly undeceived. The spotted ones were vanishing over the next brow, two fields away—flying up the east wind, with Gaddesby Hall and its surroundings left far behind. There was nothing for it but to sit down and make up the ground as fast as one dare squeeze a half-prepared horse. Everything, luckily, was in favour of quick going. The ground was sound and well turfed ; the fences were mostly a quarter of a mile apart—and, though stiff in the main, had many useful easy places in the line of route. The wavy ridge and furrow was ruled the right way ; and, above all, there was no crowd to choke the gaps. Two deep, hidden grips in midfield were nasty traps for blown horses. There was no

seeing them till you felt the check fore or aft. You were lucky if your stride happened right, and you escaped the purler that stopped Mr. W. Martin's forward career. A cluster of open drains (opposite Ashby Pastures), where so many foxes have gone to ground, was another chance that both fox and pursuit galloped right over without hindrance. Eighteen minutes now and one welcome gasp, while Mr. Beaumont is off his horse at a locked gate into the lane 'twixt Ashby Village and Pastures. Only a low stile out; but we are no longer in a position to take liberties. That it is stiff and greasy is but too obvious; and it is only under stern compulsion that Firr's lead is accepted—while one who seeks a weaker and blinder place comes through with a clatter that might be heard at the Coplow. The pack are still a long half-field in front, over fine-scenting, wide-spreading, grass country—the little following now narrowed to huntsman, Master, and three or four others. Soon Mr. Coupland's weak knee fails him at a fence; and a nasty roll and a jarred joint are the result. Then, with most of the jumping power gone, the huntsman rattles the strong low timber in a high bullfinch. Mr. Beaumont and Mr. Parker each hit it hard; while Mr. Watts and Mr. Cradock find a weak place in the hedge alongside, and brush through it in such fashion as panting horses can achieve. Thus struggling on, they reach the grassy gully opposite Thorpe Trussells, leave the covert one field to the left, and come up to hounds as the latter cross the new railway by a bridge. Mr. A. Paget is standing in the field by his house (Thorpe Satchville Hall), when the pack appear over the railway, and hover for a moment all round him "Have you seen him, sir?" "No." "How long have you been here?" "Only a minute"—a comforting assurance; Reynard may still be forward. In a second they are pushing on again; and strike the road into the village twenty-eight minutes from the start—twenty-eight minutes as sharp and severe and sweet as heart of sportsman could desire. The drizzling rain is thickening and the sky is blackening. Our fox has run a lane for some hundred yards; and the scent is

no longer what it was. But patience, and a thorough trust in the leading hounds, carry the huntsman through; and so, without any absolute check, the pack break again on to the grass, and speed away as cheerily as ever. Horses have just caught their second wind—while smoking and steaming for those few moments to give hounds room in the lane. Covert-coats are soaked abominations, no longer keeping out the rain, but excluding all air from the wearer, and adding several pounds' weight of tophamper to a horse's burden.

Adam's Gorse is left two fields to the right; and the Melton Steeplechase Course is cut clean across. Each eye is strained over the green heights of Burrough Hill and the rising ground on either side, to catch a glimpse of the quarry that surely must be sinking now. But no sign of him is to be made out; and hounds touch the road just under the village of Burrough-on-the-Hill, to cast and feather round in difficulties. Again it is steady road-work by some of the more accomplished old matrons; and again they leave the road, to drive right up into Burrough Village. And here their fox has crept into some outhouse, drain, or other place of refuge—a place of security that he must have known well and depended on heartily, or he would never have faced the wind for such a distance and at such a pace. Every possible point of exit from the village is carefully "made good," and nearly an hour is spent in rummaging for his hiding-place. But all to no purpose; and a gallant fox, if he recovers the strain of such a journey, may give us that beautiful line again.

GRASS AND WATER.

A DELIGHTFUL day of sport was Friday, November 4th, with the Quorn—such sport as you come to the Shires to see, and can see nowhere else. You may find as thorough foxhunting elsewhere; you may go over more ground—and sometimes

you may go over it as quick. But where will you get half—a tenth part of—the fun and life on the way? You should be young, or still fancy yourself young. It is not a country for riding to points, or for sitting in your saddle on a quiet eminence, watch in hand. You must still be hearty and ambitious enough to bustle and thrust, if only by road and lane. You must at least throw in energy enough to grow red in the face, mop your brow, and talk excitedly when a gallop is over. (We speak of a *gallop* here—very seldom of a *run* unless it has failed to reach the standard of a gallop.) You must come home aglow, swear you never rode such a horse in your life, order the best of your limited cellar, and drink foxhunting emphatically at least once a week—or things are going down-hill, and the sooner you are off to Mudshire the better.

Here are the events of Friday, as far as I can set on paper the outline of what already seems a hurried happy dream—figures, faces, and facts tumbling over each other in a misty chaos of excited action. Memory may clear and the thread unwind itself as I go along. I remember, to start with, that the meet was Beeby, the field (the effect of non-advertisement) scarcely a crowd—certainly not a medley—and that the chief new arrivals were the Duke of Portland and Captain Candy. I remember that a stiff shower took all the glaze off our war-paint ere the meet was reached—and that throughout the day the air was hot and choking as a sirocco (three days previously, you may remember, we were slipping about in the snow at Tilton!). Now we are at the Coplow; memory has had a dig of the spur; and we may start fair.

After cubhunting experience, it was only to be expected that a cloud of foxes should be afoot. (No, by the bye, the term, an old book told me years ago, should be a sculk of foxes, as it was also of friars and thieves; while, added the same authority, a company of cobblers should be spoken of as “a drunken-ship.”) But it was luck and ready management that allowed of our getting away at once with the traveller. It is no easy matter to lay hounds on from Botany Bay, the covert under

the Coplow Hill. But to holloa and horn they were soon over the crest and away for the wilds. The dips and rises that come, like a chopping sea, by Tomlin's Spinney and thence in the Tilton direction are more fit for mountain mules than for lengthy Leicestershire horses, though I fancy the mule would turn stubborn, had he to face the blackthorn fences as well as to climb the steep grass ridges. I need make no long story of this run. It was in the main a pleasant, galloping half hour—a plough-team and its fresh-turned soil giving five minutes' breathing time *en route*. Still, a fox that will go at once from the Coplow to ground in the Tilton Highlands deserves credit, and gives hope for a future day. And before reaching the Cottesmore Woods, there were ten very good minutes over big grass fields, and fences that, while looking rather formidable, everyone could jump—and everybody did jump in safety and pride. (What more do you want for a field, each member of which is bent on taking a part, for his own fun and according to his self-measurement?) By Skeffington Wood and Tilton Wood—to ground in the earths below the latter—the run over, thirty-five minutes registered, and horses and men alike giving perspiring evidence of the closeness of the day and the severity of the ground—and this on the very spot where they were shivering so bitterly three days before.

Moving back into Quorn territory through Tilton, Lord Moreton's covert became the next point of appeal. A small gorse covert on a spur, overlooking the wet and narrow grass vale that runs from John o' Gaunt to the Coplow—and along which, alas, a railway now runs too. The field were posted up aloft; the huntsman worked his way round the spur; and the field gradually went to sleep. Huntsman and hounds had disappeared beyond the spur, and covert was supposed to be blank. Some minutes had elapsed, when a plough-boy below was heard to observe casually (by no means addressing himself to the expectant field), "They're gone a goodish way by now!" It came like a bucket of cold water dashed in one's face! The first instinct was go, somewhere. Doun the hill and

round the spur—a distant echo of the horn—three fences madly ridden—and the hounds, thank Heaven, only just flashing on the line of a wandering fox. Comforting anyhow—but only the negative comfort of a run not missed. They were not away in the distance after all—your heart need not have palpitated, your spirit need not have sunk, and you need not have cursed the occasion yet. Hounds could not grasp the line one bit ; and here we were beside the new railway, a chasm running under it at right angles, and the huntsman's cast completely cornered. Holloa forrad ! Nilsson's most nightingale note never sounded so sweet. The outlying fox had crossed the whole company three fields back ; the chasm was found to have a loophole, and in another minute hounds were galloped to this second holloa. On the damp sedgey grass of this undrained valley, they settled down at once to run brilliantly. Only a *fair* scent in the morning—a *screaming* scent now. The Coplow was but a couple of miles away. But why should a fresh fox seek the Coplow ? Why indeed, but the point suggested itself only too forcibly to half of a good, hardriding field. You can't gallop deep short ridge-and-furrow as easily as the pack can skim it. The railway was to the right of hounds, a line of gates a hundred yards to the left of them. So the argument ran. But the fox ran otherwise, and the pack curled away from all speculation. One field short of the Coplow it bore to the right, as the railway bent, and headed for Quenby Hall. If you followed some better genius, and after him were hopping over those neat-built hedges and watery hollows, with every turn in your favour—you yet ran no chance of over-riding hounds as they neared Quenby Hall. Downs was flying the fences nearest to them on the right ; Mr. A. Brocklehurst (a new, and worthy, acquisition to Leicestershire) just to his left, with Firr in his unalterable place. If you kept any one of these in sight, you saw the gallop ; and, following the track of hounds, were led under the railway by an arch, through a plantation by an easy timbered jump. ('Tis curious how a fox will generally go a rideable line, through the midst of the stiffest country, as if he meant

to give a huntsman fair play!) Many who were riding close and fair here threw themselves wide by keeping to the right of the pack. Hounds passed just to the left of the old Hall—flying up the hill at a pace that left horses farther behind each moment. Already there were not a score of men to compose the van—though the real tussle had as yet scarcely lasted a quarter of an hour. Leaving the Hall and Park behind, these pushed hard after the fleeting pack—across the beautiful, and better-drained, pastures that open a perfect riding line to Baggrave. An unexpected wire left a stout ugly stile, stony and slippery on either side, and overhung by a tree, the only point at which passage over the next bottom was possible. Every horse slipped at it, and most horses hit it; but, apparently, all the leaders who would chance it passed safely over. Now the grass is firmer once more; the fences come again in your stride, and some of the lost ground can be made up. The first few, as already named, have been joined by Mr. Beaumont-Lubbock, Captain Middleton, Colonel Chippindall, Mr. Watts, the first whip, and another. The casualties are coming rapidly—Hold up, old horse! That stumble has taken all your little remaining wind away. You wouldn't refuse if you had strength to jump; so you must have it your own way and stop! Firr and others turn one field to the right to catch the Hungerton brook where the Baggrave and Quenby road bridges it. “Keep on straight, Major, for Heaven's sake! They are half a field already the better of us, and hounds a full field the better of them!” Oh, whitefaced chestnut, why should you take off a full stride too soon, when every inch should have been of value to your half-exhausted powers? A cropper of course! No! Yes!! No—o!!! A sharp rowel and a tough-skinned shoulder just achieve a rescue. The chestnut is up with a tuft of grass on his forehead-band; and in fifty or sixty yards more his rider is no longer between his ears, but back in the saddle looking round for the Major. Nothing to be seen of him. Of course he has turned to the right after Firr: so the other may push along at his best, and compare notes afterwards. (Paren-

thesis—Note compared afterwards, “ Where *did* you go, Major, instead of coming over the brook ? ” “ Where *did I* go indeed ? Why, under the water with my horse on the top of me. Look at me ! ” And, indeed he looked like it—yet laughed merrily, and said never a word to upbraid the familiar friend, who had so unconsciously left him to be drowned or smothered.)

Out of the road now, at General Burnaby’s Waterloo farm, into the only bit of plough the whole gallop contained. The little blue mare is pulled right over by the bullfinch ; and for the few who clamber through it there is a slow sobbing progress through those half dozen acres. Another horse stands still in the lane above ; and then come three wide grass fields to Baggrave Hall—only the tail-hounds in view, and only Downs, Firr, and the whip, near enough to see even them. The wire fence of the park involves a wide detour and a loss of half a minute’s time. Meanwhile Muggleton, of fox-keeping fame, has seen the fox pass by the Prince of Wales’ Gorse (five-and-thirty minutes after leaving Lord Moreton’s), with the leading hounds only fifty yards from his brush. By this time of course they are out of sight ; and the huntsman overshoots the mark, with the body of the pack already on a fresh line. For in the hot still air the sound of the coming chase has been carried forward for miles ; and at least three foxes are already afoot. The leading couples are the next moment visible across the valley, running hard by South Croxton. The rest of the pack is hurried round to them ; but the beaten fox has dodged them in a hedgerow—and false information leads on to a fresh fox and the loss of a fine finish. Yet it was a splendid gallop ; and instanced the pace of Mr. Coupland’s lady pack very vividly. There was nothing to stop horses but the tremendous pace ; and hounds fairly beat them after the first twenty minutes—the whole time of the run, up to South Croxton, being fully three-quarters of an hour. Again, it will easily be understood that, in making use of the names of some who were nearest hounds, I have been by no means speaking of a number of men racing against each other. In a really good

To face page 384.

"WHERE DID YOU GO, MAJOR, INSTEAD OF COMING OVER THE BROOK?"



gallop with such hounds as are now going over the Shires, it is simply a question of how many riders are well mounted enough, quick enough, and lucky enough, to keep them in sight at all. A single mistake or bad turn will throw the best man out of a burst; while only a horse that is stouter, faster, fitter and freer than common has a chance of coming through the ordeal with credit. It is on these lines that competition can exist without jealousy. And thus only has a scribe a legitimate right to the use of names. He notes a record of high performance, not a story of mischievous rivalry.

ST. MARTIN'S SUMMER.

SAINT MARTIN's summer, I am told, is the name by which the recent warmth of early November should be called. An after-taste of summer truly, and a banquet of sport for a Martinmas feast. St. Martin for the future is my patron saint; and the Bishop of Tours-and-Foxhunting, my nightly toast. Such sport as has been pouring in lately, each day and every day, has exceeded the most random hopes. Such an autumn has not been seen in anything like middle-aged memory—and half-hours with pen and paper, snatched in the midcurrent of events so stirring and hurried, are inadequate to convey at all a full idea. But the chronicler cannot stop at home to write—if he is to see what he has to write about. Hence “errors and omissions excepted” must be held an admissible plea: and his notes taken in lieu of better. In a word, hounds have run hard every day, foxes have selected the choicest lines, and fine runs and fine finishes have been of daily occurrence.

I need go back as far as Wednesday, November 9th, only to note that the Belvoir had a sterling thirty-five minutes from Melton Spinney, to ground in Grimston Gorse. Those who know the country will recognise how good the line, and how

sharp the pace, when they are asked to follow a route—that nearly reached Thorpe Arnold, bent to the right into the Quorn country (leaving Old Hills just to the right, Cant's Thorns to the left, Wartnaby again to the right) by Saxelby Spinney into Old Dalby Wood, and back to the earths in Grimston Gorse. All this was enacted in five minutes over the half hour—the distant points being close upon five miles apart. The same day two of the Meltonians took rail to the Pytchley at Misterton, and returned saying they had seldom seen a better day's sport. The items are probably set down at length elsewhere in the columns of the *Field*. They appear to have included a twenty-five minutes from Misterton Reeds round the back of Lutterworth, and a clean kill; besides a forty minutes ring from Shawell Wood, and a subsequent dart thence over the Stanford Hall country.

Friday, November 11th, was actually the Day of the Saint afore-mentioned. The Quorn kept it at Rearsby; and served up a brace of foxes handsomely to his honour. They started fully a leash before them from the little covert of Bleakmoor; and after half an hour's hard running round Brooksby and Hoby, and amid the commingled difficulties of river and railway, killed a fox of giant proportion on the lawn of Brooksby Hall. A hotter, rosier, field was seldom seen; but the sun was scarcely over the yard-arm, and the lord of the manor complained that solicitation and soda water met with but meagre response.

Chippy and parched, yet moist and melting they were, though, before the chief act of the day was done. The Gaddesby Spinnies again! A run every time of asking. It was the long narrow plantation creeping up the hillside towards Queniboro', that supplied the event to-day. In single file the field held up one side. Of course the fox went away the other. That first quarter-mile of uphill plough—in dark uncertainty—was horrible. Master was round quick enough to stay the foremost skirmishers who could hurry round the second privet spinney. Yes, they are away now; and you may ride your

best after the parti-coloured ladies. (I speak advisedly—for the Alfred roan, the Craven blue, the Belvoir tan, and the yellow of Duster and distant ages, are all blended in as smart a pack as was ever kennelled at Quorn.) The Gaddesby valley is in front; and they are so close at their fox that before he clears the parish he and they are in the same lime-covered plough—the only broken soil in the run. Up and across the brookside to Ashby Folville—an ex-soldier, whose name must occur again on the page, being, with the huntsman, nearest to them, till a twisted fetlock not only robs the former of his sport, but sentences him to a six mile term in Bartley's unwalkables, in company with another good rider unhorsed. At Ashby Folville a moment's healthy check. For the air is positively sultry, and the ground quite wet enough and hilly enough—fences well within management so far. At least I can recall nothing that somebody had not broken down sufficiently—even the ten foot bullfinch that a man on duty went through, leaving not even a clue to a hole in the apparently impervious wall. The pack are now running *terribly* smart—the same sweet grass valley still, till they seem to be leaving us for the day. As they turn to the right a mile short of Twyford they are just to be caught, and Reynard is just to be seen across the brook half a mile away. (A cheery fillip to a huntsman is a view of a fox when hounds have been at him some twenty minutes.) The Twyford Brook ought to be nothing. It is nothing right and left. But here it is unreasoning enough to shelve and twist and burrow, and scarcely ever to give the opportunity for which alone it must have been dragged across a foxhunting country. You must look before you leap—a very fatal insistence. The huntsman, however, makes little of it. Next comer takes his chance and very nearly takes his cropper—leaving the latter a legacy for next follower. Well-educated sportsman appears on the scene. “Know there's a ford. Here are the bullock-tracks into the water from the other side.” The thorns studding the nearer bank may check the bullocks; but not the man to whom Leicestershire is a map engraved on

a broader scale than the new six-mile-to-an-inch survey. In a moment he is in girth deep (R.E. on-the-survey, please, note depth—"river passable for cavalry"). Next five minutes are simply—the pack screaming forward, and Firr doing gimlet with his cap and ears, through three consecutive bullfinches. Cursed be he that invented tall hats. Will no nobleman of ancient title and democratic principles (this latter is an essential if a new fashion is to be set and to prevail) come out in a cap? We will all, I can answer for it, bang our swallow-tails in symphony and gratitude at once. Or, failing titled aristocracy, will not some one of lesser degree dare retrogression (though, may be, provincial) and inaugurate a fellowship of caps and comfort? Hats are said to break a fall. But did a cap ever break a neck? And *why* should one be called upon to come through a fence in three pieces—hat, hatstring, and following—requiring a whole field's length to put the three components again in unison, and another to steady horse and regain sight of hounds? Answer me this, please, omniscient editor—and let me get on with the Quorn fox swinging round and back, from Twyford—along that loveable hillside to Barsby. There they make their fences on purpose for blown hunters, and drain their fields with the same laudable object. I wish they would latch their gates nicely, too; and my friend wishes he had not jumped off into the mud to lift one off its hinges, while the grateful ones let his borrowed horse get caught in between gate and gatepost. Barsby Crossroads, and thirty-five minutes by general agreement, is the next entry—with a mental note that crossroads with a field of horsemen are a thumbscrew to a huntsman. But it was a very pretty mile of road work, and a charming unravelment, that set horn going again a little way short of Queniboro' Spinney. Soon the field had a six-foot brook—and a chance no fellow could miss. So fifty men 'twixt fox and hounds, and a consequent ten minutes' hindrance. But I need not postpone the end of a satisfactory story. Eyelids grow heavy, too, and under duty's stern orders I must be in the saddle in time for another of these daily hardships. Firr

handled the delinquent in the open opposite Baggrave—an hour and a quarter (if I remember right) from the time he first screamed at him from Gaddesby Spinney. Revenge is sweet, and it must have been appetising to whip his brush off in the very field where the previous Friday's fox had shifted his difficulties on to a fresh comer.

Saturday, Nov. 12th, when the Belvoir met at Hose Grange, was equally a fine scenting day, and was marked by one of those specially quick bursts for which the Duke's country has ever been remarkable. They ran clean into their fox in fifteen minutes over the open! Mr. Sherbrooke (as all our little world knows) built his pretty covert on the bank of the Smite, to command the best of the Belvoir Vale, and as a link between the hill coverts of the Quorn Widmerpool district and the similar range of Ducal coverts on the high ground of Harby, Piper Hole, &c. Very grateful should be the frequenters of both countries, as I shall endeavour to show.

An excellent, but not overwhelming, field saw the covert in question drawn on Saturday. The gorse has been levelled by the severity of winters past; but the other half is a few feet high in sprouting blackthorn. A rather meagre fox showed himself twice before he would fight. Then he chose the farther side of the little river for his early battle-ground. So there was a hurrying forth over the wooden bridge, quite as early as hounds could clear themselves from the covert. A first fence should not, in common fairness, have presented only one opening in its tangled length. A hundred eager people, and hounds running hard! Manners are virtue at such a moment—and happily, virtue reigns supreme in Shire-land. But a second fence really need not have been an exact repetition of the first. It was taxing consideration for others almost too high. Then the pack turned over the Smite. There was no following them, with a dense bullfinch fringing the stream (it strikes me this is a half sentence I have written before—*re* the same crude watercourse). A very plain, but very new, oxer barred passage alongside. The ice (or the initial rail) had only to be broken;

and the fence was easy enough. Next the hard turnpike, and a hammering mile up it towards Clawson. After this only Gillard, Captain Middleton (who must forgive reiteration); and the first whip, really attending hounds in their quick passage over a close flat meadow country towards the Harby Hills. The farmers are fair, if rather fierce, in the way they build their fences hereabouts, and there were a dozen neat strong stake-and-bounds to be jumped in as many minutes, ere the village of Hose (if my geography did not fail me) was passed, and the field closed up. Quite one of the quickest, over oxer or simpler hedge-and-ditch, was Mrs. Sloane-Stanley on "Tip-top"—a hunter long known to fame in Melton. It only remains to be said that, before the Harby Hills, or even the belt of ploughed ground beneath them, could be reached, hounds were on their fox in a ditch; and the scurry was over. Hose Gorse and Kay Wood were drawn in vain; and the day wound up with an hour's twisting run from Harby Gorse—the last twenty minutes being over the grassy vale by Langar and nearly to Wiverton. After various previous vicissitudes among railways, canals, and other difficulties, they lost their fox at Colston Bassett; and the Meltonians nearly all lost their way in the dark afterwards, narrowly escaping the fate of having to camp out dinnerless (an experience that would have been altogether out of keeping with the *régime* of the little metropolis in the present day).

We now come to Monday last, November 14th, with the Quorn at Widmerpool New Inn. I have no wish to inflict a heavy volume on readers who are good enough to dip into my jottings. But such a day's sport as Monday's must not be left unwritten. There were two runs, two foxes fairly killed in the open; and the first gallop was as handsome and good as ever man rode to. A burning scent and a beautiful country made the day complete. Widmerpool, as already mentioned in passing, lies on the high ridge of the Quorn country, looking over much of the prettiest of the Belvoir Vale. If a fox will but take the lower level, you must be on ground over which it is a

luxury to ride. On the other hand, Widmerpool *may* mean a muddy day: yet it is all a sporting, if not a fashionable country. But we have to do with The Vale to-day—The Parson's and the Curate's, and the happy grass glebe below. A dense fog lifted just as the meeting-hour arrived; and about 11·15 on a warm dull day the Master led a sanguine field in the direction of the two contiguous coverts. To all appearance nobody of lesser degree than the castle-folk inhabits the Widmerpool wolds. But somehow a jungle race crops up whenever the country is to be hunted; and shows an infinite interest in the pastime. By intuition or hint the nomade body knew the two crack coverts were to be drawn; and the hillside round and about was already besprinkled. Scream and howl and yell suddenly burst forth—such as when a hare springs up on Cæsar's Camp, and an Aldershot division is waiting under arms for a nice H. R. H. noonday inspection in July. Only three-parts of the field had arrived. Only half had changed hack for hunter. Only a quarter thought anything of the foolish noise. But Firr was already on the gallop to The Parson's; dipped into the hollow beneath it, and rose the hill again above—to clap hounds on where the old fox had passed, from his quiet stubble field beside the road. Thus there was a gain of ground against a trifling loss of time; and, though some tail hounds caught heel, the head carried them forward at once, and in a moment they were together and away. A spur of high ground runs into the Vale from The Parson's to Hickling; and the left side of it is cut and broken by a couple of bottoms, at right angles to the direction in which hounds were running hard. A flurry and flounder and a broken stirrup-leather were the earliest result of the first rugged nullah. A refusal followed, and then a complete choke up of the only desirable place. But the brow of the spur was the better line to have chosen; for in another half-mile the racing pack swung over it, and swept into the Vale to the right, heading straight down for Sherbrook's Covert. Two wide grass fields form the slope; and men were sitting back and

driving their horses viciously—for the pack had so far been going much faster than they could. Into the old rough road below; out over a strong tough stile; and on across the sound flat turf and neat enclosures, the huntsman's grey was to be seen creeping gradually up to hounds, Captains Smith and Middleton on either flank, Mr. Beaumont Lubbock and Miss Story close at his heels. Of the two latter it would be difficult to say whose mount was the quicker better fencer—he riding his four hundred guineas' full worth from Captain O'Neal's late stud, the lady on a thoroughbred that jumped light as air. Very near at hand were Mr. W. Chaplin and his daughter; and immediately in their wake Mr. Coupland, Lord Cloncurry, Mr. Praed, Mr. Behrens, Mr. Parker, Major Robertson, a stranger in black, and half a dozen others. This was the view from the brow, as the chase spread over the plain, and pressed on to Sherbrooke's Covert.

A twist to the right and a turn to the left; the van closes up; and swings past the covert (one field to the left). Why, here we are at the very gap in the high bullfinch, at which so many of us were choked off at starting for the Belvoir scurry of Saturday! Well, there's little crowding now; and half the leaders slip over the Smite by the wooden bridge at the covert. Hounds cross two fields lower down; and so does Firr, carrying with him a rotten rail that tries hard to pull him into the deep muddy brook. The jump is naturally all the easier for this; and now the direction is Long Clawson. The Hickling-and-Clawson road is cut exactly where it was two days ago by the Belvoir; and fence for fence the track is the same for another mile. But, holding straight on over the Vale, hounds run up to the village of Hose; and a hat up proclaims that Reynard has sought refuge among the houses. Directly afterwards, Firr's eye catches sight of his draggled form crawling into a stackyard. Who-whoop! the ladies have him. Thirty minutes from the time he left his kennel—and as fine and fast and sweet a gallop as lives in the annals of Quorn. A grand great muscular fox—they burst him from start to

finish, and never gave him a chance of breathing or turning. A field so hot, and red, and happy, and talkative—I would that our artist had been there to paint it.

Just as brilliant scent prevailed when, after an unpleasant ride back along a canal towing path, the same company set off



TOM FIRR.

again from The Curate. But this time their fox was a very different animal. He, too, went down into the Vale ; but ran like a cub that knew little country. Twice he was close to Sherbrooke's Covert ; then he ran through the village of Hickling and back by The Parson's. But through all his meanderings hounds were able to push him hard—most of the time over pretty grass country—and after fifty minutes bowled him over also—in the very field whence the fox of the morning had sprung.

THE TILTON DAY OF 1881.

TUESDAY, November 29th, was a great day with the Cottesmore, from a meet, too, which generally arouses anything but anticipation and enthusiasm, Tilton Wood, to wit.

The personal experiences of a correspondent are, besides being his own property, anything but what the public cares to have. But the pronoun *I* must come in here for the moment. Stable exigencies put it very plainly before me overnight, that *half* a day's hunting was all I could look to on the morrow. Thus, the choice apparently lying between a morning among the Tilton woods and hills, and an afternoon with the great coverts of Launde and Owston on the verge of a fine country—I decided for the latter probability; and accordingly, starting at 11·30 found myself about one o'clock on Whadborough Hill, overlooking miles of the steep undulation and woody glens of High Leicestershire. It was a cold bright day—the film of a frosty morning just disappearing beneath a brilliant sun and a cloudless sky. The bark of a sheepdog, even the crowing of a cock, could be heard from an immense distance in the still sharp air. But never a note of horn or hound, not a cheer nor a rate, broke the deathlike silence of the Cottesmore highlands. Sandwiches were despatched, flask and cigar case appealed to; and thought went back to the only previous occasion on which the policy of speculation had been adopted—and when the result had been a wet afternoon spent in solitary meditation at Curate's Gorse. Still there was no more sign or sound of fox hunting than if Leicestershire had been under the ban of Curraghmore: and at two o'clock I left my post of observation to seek for information or companionship on the lower ground. Taking the road from Owston Wood to Launde, I soon fell in with both—but the information was somewhat vague, and the company anything but merry. Knot after knot of well caparisoned sportsmen did I meet—all wearing the same glum faces

and bright clean clothes, and one and all telling the tale they illustrated so well. They hadn't *believed* in a run from the Tilton woods. "Who was going to bucket up and down those beastly *hills*?" There *had* been a run: hounds had gone clean away into the Quorn country; and—who would have thought it?—they had been left behind!

Deeply though your correspondent had been pitying himself overnight and through the morning, it was clear that here at least were worse sufferers; upon whom, in fact, he could look with an eye of pity and impertinence of superior case—declining altogether to be deemed one of their number, however illustrious and highly constituted the latter. Among this body of noble gentlemen were such hard riders and good men to hounds as Messrs. ——. No, thanks, Mr. Printer, I prefer their friendly greetings even to gratifying your curiosity.

But scarcely had the dismal truth been duly impressed, with all proper decorate, expletive, and attendant circumstance, as each sufferer's case seemed to demand, than another bright corps was seen to be advancing through the sunshine, from Owston Village. And soon, with beaming face, with splashed and often plastered garment, the rest of the brotherhood rode up, *with* the hounds. It was no use for the unfortunates awaiting them to affect a temper and bearing akin to the joviality of the new comers. The pretence sat badly on them; and they winced perceptibly, though as cheerfully as might be, under the storm of jest and banter poured upon their luckless and misguided heads. The others, you may be sure, made none the least of what they had seen; but pare it down and minimise it as much as the most disappointed detractor could have wished, there must remain at least this much—that hounds had run heartily up the valley by Tugby Bushes, then past the back of Tilton Village to Lowesby, and to ground at Carr Bridge (in the Quorn country and within a mile of Baggrave) in five-and-thirty minutes from the start. Their fox was only just before them as he got to ground—indeed, during

the last few minutes of the gallop, he was several times to be seen in front of the pack.

But fortunate and unfortunate alike now threw in their luck together again ; and entered, or skirted, Owston Wood, full of hope for the afternoon. In the still frosty air the huntsman worked his way down its length ; and it must have been a dull-eared or confident fox that waited to be found—for so clear and quiet was it that each crack of the whip sounded like the midday gun. Yet, when half the great covert had been worked through, up he jumped right among the pack, whisked his brush in their faces, and darted for the open—his head straight for Melton in the distance. A very keen following was close with hounds now. Nobody meant to be left behind a second time to-day : and they trooped out of the wood with the best of chances before them. But, alas, Reynard's path was barred in this promising direction ; and he doubled back upon the whip, who was galloping to the cry. The scent was too burning, and the pack too close at his great black brush, for him to stay ; and he cut through the deep muddy wood, to break at once on the opposite, or Withcote side. Thus, while the second whip went away for a merry dart by himself, the baffled field had either to plunge slowly through the broad middle ride or to swing round the road between the two woods. In either case they only reached the other side, to find hounds a full half mile before them, with Launde Wood as their probable destination. For once the macadam played a happy part ; and threw in their faces a chance of which under no other conditions could they have availed themselves. From Withcote to Tilton Station ran the road. For Launde, Loddington, or the chain of hilly woodlands ran Reynard. Somebody, something—blessed be he or it—met him face to face ; and drove him off at a tangent to Colborough Hill, the wooded mound that stands over Tilton Station. Thus the frantic galloping roadsters suddenly found themselves alongside the flying pack. With a two mile rush they had cut off a segment of a circle of not less than three ; and the best of the run was

still to come. The scent was tremendous ; and, of course, the pace in keeping. There were plenty of good men on the track now—doing their utmost over what is undoubtedly the most difficult country in the Shires to cross with quickness and credit. The hills are very severe ; the ridge and furrow very exhausting ; and half the fences altogether unjumpable. Overpressing hounds when they can run over this ground is, happily, an impossibility. To keep them in sight must be the only aim. Up and down the great bullock grounds some twenty or thirty men were pushing hard, on the best of horses, to have a share in the fun. Prominent among the party in front were Mr. Baird, Mr. Tailby, Sir Bache and Mr. G. Cunard, Captain and Mrs. Blair (the latter riding brilliantly in both gallops of the day), Colonel and the Messrs. Gosling, Mr. Logan, Mr. Marshall, Mr. Westley-Richards, Mr. Horace Flower and others—with Neal and Goddard on the spot for emergencies. Not that the pack ever wanted help. Hounds ran without a check of the smallest description for some fifty-two or fifty-three minutes from the find. And this is how they travelled. They went on from Tilton Station (which, by the way, is more than a mile and a half from the village) to pass between Tilton Wood and Tilton Village, over the brow as in the morning, pointing for Quorn territory ; ran to within a couple of fields of Lord Moreton's covert ; then swung leftwards towards The Coplow. Just short of Tomlin's Spinnies (which face The Coplow) their fox's heart failed him, and bending suddenly still more to the left, he headed round for Skeffington Wood. Leaving that and Tilton Wood just to the right (the pace as furious as ever), he got back as far as Colborough Hill ; and dipping into the railway behind it, slipped into a short drain by the side of the metals. A finer, faster, hound-run it would be difficult to conceive ; while all but the early part was splendid sport for every rider lucky enough to grasp it. Of course hounds deserved their fox ; and equally of course it was determined that they should, if possible, have him. But in the midst of well meant attempts, a coal train came by—neces-

sitating a temporary cessation on the part of the diggers. Reynard evidently thought the game was now being played on principles of which he could not approve ; so, taking advantage of the lull, he did his best to slip away from the scene. But the fifty and odd minutes' strain had nearly run his watch down ; and, after he had doubled the hedgerows for some few minutes more, he gave up his gallant black brush. Such is the brief outline of the Tilton Day of 1881.

TRIFLES.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 19TH.

THE Quorn at Ratcliffe-on-the-Wreake, a wild, wet, and windy day. It requires all the power of a hot bath and a strong cup of tea to fit one for the thirty minutes' penwork that dinner allows. The poet may write by the midnight oil : the foxhunter's prosy and practical tale must be scribbled before his meal ; for a tired frame, weary eyelids, and satisfied hunger revolt against pen and paper. We can give with ready tongue, and tell in eager cat's chorus—few listening, all talking —while the social meal proceeds, our respective experiences of the day past. But paper is unappreciative material, and the pen is a cold-blooded pal ; Nature is weak, and anything except water is strong—or at least aids the crimping, woolly effect of half a gale from the south-west. You ought to come home in the middle of the day, to write of hunting—and miss the good thing of the afternoon. Or, as alternative, you should hunt only five days—and so be at home while the best run of the week is going on. By the way, what a correspondent might be made of a shorthand writer under cover at Melton dinners ! His anecdotes should perhaps be "assorted ;" and might perchance be as varied as authentic ; but at least he would get the pith and point, if he did not attain to the exact outline, of *every* run.

"Three white frosts and rain." So it was, when Monday, Dec. 19, opened with a cold steady downpour. Cossington Gorse, with the wind in the north-east, seemed, however, a fair enough prospect. The recent touch of frost had brought it vividly before men's minds that Christmas was not far off, and that the weather might at any moment adopt the rôle of "seasonable." They were keen as the air, and hungry as winter wolves. Ratcliffe is so far removed from all that is not purely Quornite that the field is almost entirely confined to the Hunt, and is quite diminutive as compared with that of a Friday jubilee. The latter runs into a quarter of a thousand as an ordinary thing ; and, as occasion demands, or the season goes on, frequently attains to double that size. To-day—an ante-Christmas Monday—was a marked and pleasant contrast, as I can show from personal observation. Arriving at the covert-side quite as late as a careful man should do, the gay procession filed across me ; and, headed by the staff, passed along the road on its way to Cossington Gorse. Thus, while trotting up, I had the opportunity of counting off its numbers to a nicety ; and the whole party, including every second horseman and every mounted man and woman in sight, did not exceed seventy. Very cheering the bright-coloured *cortège* looked, this dull cold morning. There was no rain now ; waterproofs had been cast off, or carriages just forsaken, and the butterflies were airing their fresh untarnished feathers. Closer inspection, however, found anything but gaiety depicted on the faces of those who had lightened their day's work by driving to the meet in open carriages. Some people, well-fleshed and warm-blooded, carry a store of caloric in their veins, that makes them proof against the chilliest blast. But to an ordinary mortal—still more to one of extra length and sparer built—a drive to covert on a box-seat, the wind from the north and the thermometer low in the thirties, is absolute and unconquerable misery. His blood seems to cease its course ; his limbs dry up ; and his ribs seem to open to the wind. His pinched features, blanched or blue, green or tiptinted (a

word surely as appropriate as the Laureate's familiar adjective), are an index of the agony within. His physical sufferings bear upon "a mind unhinged;" and his thoughts revert to every calamity that has affected him in the recent past or may come upon him in the possible future. Broker wrote this morning that the good thing in American Railways has already dropped him enough to have paid all the winter cornbills. Groom had a gruesome story at starting of Best-and-Bravest's backsinew having "altogether gone this time." Again, he knows the only bad-shouldered brute in the stable has been sent on this morning—and it's a dreadful country for stiff timber. Oh, how the old collar-bone does ache to-day! His toes feel as if they were under the wheel of that passing waggon—and the very thought makes him cringe to his marrow. "You must get out and open the gate, my dear!" John has gone on with Missis' horse; and, ulster and silk apron nevertheless, poor Benedict has to scramble up and down the muddy wheel. "Why the deuce doesn't old Skinflint fence his field, and do away with the epithet gates? There now, you've gone on just as I was getting in! I think you *might* have held the brute properly. I've got my thinnest boots on, and you've dropped me right into a puddle! Really—" And with all his natural ill-temper fully aroused, Benedict *ferox* at length reaches his saddle, to find that his second-horseman has done everything he should not, and has carefully forgotten to do all that he should. Having vented his feelings volubly on the scapegoat (who, however, is quite used to the office of safety-valve, and performs it with perfect equanimity), B. moves on, trying hard to wreath his countenance in its customary beaming smile—the while he feels injured, miserable, chilled, and in a funk. No, the Sybaritical luxury of a brougham is the only mode of comfort on wheels: though, as long as we are on the right side of sixty, a galloping hack gives more pleasure than even the morning paper and a cigarette. Yet there is one state of things under which it would not only be excusable, but sensible, to show a preference the other way—I mean a morning of fog

or frost, when hunting, to be practicable at all, must be postponed for an hour or two. Such an instance was Friday of the previous week at Lowesby—when a man who did not covet the inside of a snug brougham, could only have been born to sleep without blankets.

Cossington Gorse had been carefully protected from the Sabbath incursions of Syston poachers; and a big strong fox was at home. A run brought off the north, or Segrave, side of this covert almost always means a trip over plough—of the most confirmed type. But the fox of to-day picked an especially pretty line of grass to Walton Thorns; and treated his followers to as pleasant a twenty minutes as their souls could have desired. Certainly they could not have ridden plough at that pace after the recent rains—even if hounds could have carried them on. As it was, the grass carried a scent and let them ride freely over it. Nobody seemed to believe much in the probability of finding—especially after the pack had been ten minutes in covert. And so the field left their gossiping ground (the road alongside the covert) very leisurely; and only awoke by degrees to the fact that hounds were running hard for Segrave Village. The little stream which formed the first fence looked very formidable at a distance: but was easily galloped over under the influence of example. Just short of the village, hounds bent to the right of the road; and drove along the easy well-drained meadows by the side of the Segrave Bottom. Lord Grey de Wilton had from the first been well alive to the vigour of the pursuit, and, with the huntsman, made ready play along the brookside. A bridge came fortunately in the way, just as the deep-banked stream had to be crossed; and nice country still opened ahead—Mr. B. Lubbock, Captain Middleton, Mr. Adair, and others closing up to the front. Walton Thorns was reached in bare twenty minutes; and as hounds entered one side of the covert, he was just intercepted on his way out on the other—a great galloping fox, strong and lengthy as a wolf. Turning back through the covert, he left it about the same point at which he had

entered ; and, running a frosty lane, all scent seemed to have disappeared.

The afternoon hunt was full of amusement, if of no great class. It was an hour at a good hunting pace from Thrus-sington Gorse, commencing with a dozen minutes' hard galloping to Shoby Scoles, a precipitous roadbank to slide down, and various rough places to encounter throughout the run. Afterwards, a loop round Old Dalby, very interesting in itself, very unexciting to read in detail. When the line leads over a country that is easily to be ridden as it comes, and when the country comes slow, we follow each other methodically and strictly—getting an astonishing breadth of amusement out of a process that is less mechanical than instinctive. This is especially the case with the ground deep and mauling as now. A. comes first and jumps his fence with a great deal of *aplomb*. B. comes next, and jumps it with more plumb than A., making a hole in the binder, and a hole in the ground where his heels left it. C. has to jump out of a puddle, and land into mire. D. finds a bog, with half a faggot in the middle to trip him up ; the rest of the alphabet walk through, and the farmer wonders what has become of his fence. The funny part is that scarcely anybody tumbles down. It is true that the pace has of late been generally slow and uncertain. But if a spell of fast running comes in, there must be free and frequent rolling about. A horse still in possession of his wind will make short work of an ordinary topbinder when once the sap of the thorn has gone to the roots. The same animal, gasping and ridden out, will turn helplessly over what he could have carried comfortably away on his knees if going at his leisure. Leicestershire never lay more wet than now. As it dries it will be terribly holding. As weather becomes settled, so will scent—and so shall we. At present we can splash over the ground : soon we may stick fast in it. So the present in preference to the future again ! And, to continue, from Shoby Scoles on Monday the traveller was booked *via* Lord Aylesford's Covert, then over many intricacies in the neighbourhood of Grimston

Village to Lord Brudenell's Gorse, and by Old Dalby's ravines and gullies, with little incident, save a chance illustration of the suppression of the Ladies' Land League. A good lady, who only a month ago stood in her gateway brandishing a fire-shovel, now opened the same gate with a smile that might have swallowed the weapon—or, more properly, found burial for the tomahawk. And yet (who knows?) bribery and corruption that should now be learning purity in gaol may have been at work to disarm this poor old harridan of her only ready weapon. We live in a wicked world—yet who dare give up tipping a porter or feeing his neighbour's servant? Non Ego—or, in the comprehensive diction of the Anglo-Indian, "My very poor man, Sahib." Mammon, Mammon, righteous or unrighteous, pay it in befitting coin you must—when you can. This is too suggestive of Christmas. Back to Old Dalby; on for a brief while to Six Hills; hear of a beaten fox at Lord Aylesford's; commiserate the huntsman on an unstopped earth at Shoby Scoles; and drink his health in a first bumper as to-night's occasion offers.

A curious accident is said to have occurred during the same day with the Belvoir. Since the recent autumn gale, trees, and limbs of trees, have been strewing the fields in all directions; and on Monday last it appears that a horse belonging to Colonel Reeve, and ridden by his groom, jumped over a fence into an *abattis* of fallen timber, was pierced to the heart by a branch, and died on the spot.

BOXING DAY, 1881.

VERY seasonable indeed, to many establishments, was the three days' rest enforced by the frost of Christmas. Deep ground and incessant work had begun to tell on every stud; and, however insatiate their masters might be, the grooms all passed a happier Christmas than a brief interval was allowed them for repairs. We spent Christmas on our legs; ate our

pudding without having fairly earned it—and were not half as good at turkey as we should have been a week ago. The thaw that set in on the night of the Feast was indeed a blessing—not only in the cause of sport, but of digestion. It is horrible to think of what we might have come to, had idleness and high living lasted much longer. Dinner is, to most healthy Englishmen, by no means an insignificant part of life; but an Englishman must work his way to his dinner, if he is to do justice to it and himself.

So it was a happy change that set in on Sunday night; and it was with keenest pleasure, present and anticipatory, that we set off to join the crowd at Queniboro' on Boxing Day—Monday, Dec. 26th, and the hounds at the Quorn. The meet had thus been fixed that Leicestershire might have its annual after-Xmas revel, and that Barkby Holt might have the stirring-up that accident had so long deferred. Many Melton men, fearing the crowd, had abandoned their usual Monday routine; and gone into the Belvoir Vale for the day. But the riding division was well represented, as for instance, by Lord Grey de Wilton, Mr. Harter (who has brought his horses to Somerby, and whose return to Leicestershire is a right welcome incident), by Lord Manners, Captain Starkey, Mr. Cradock, &c., &c.

With a barometer high and steady, and with the day still, warm, and dull, there should have been a great scent with which to drive the many foxes from Barkby Holt. But the morning hunt, from Barkby to Scraughton, and from Scraughton back to Barkby Holt, was very slow progress over a fine country. It was enlivened only by hounds hunting right up to their fox in a small spinney at Scraughton, and his jumping up again before their noses. Had there been a scent, a pretty finish might have been brought off—as in the afternoon. For, curiously enough, the very same thing happened in the second run (as we shall see directly); and led to a charming scamper, with a clean kill at the end. I can only account for this coincidence and singularity of behaviour on the part of the foxes by the supposition that neither of them had ever yet run before

hounds ; but, having once got a little way in front of them, imagined himself safe, and hid up.

The second one, who gave them so sporting a run of an hour or more, was found in the little wooded dell known as Carr Bridge Spinney (between Baggrave and Lowesby). The bridge in question spans a stream scarcely a dozen feet wide, the fox crossed it immediately, just beyond the spinney ; and the most ignominious fiasco at once succeeded. There was nothing but a plain flat jump at one place, only a weak post and rail on the landing side at another. But the brook wound along a grass hollow—plain to be seen, with its deep rotten banks, long before it was approached. Horses were still in cold blood—and, in short, they one and all declined firmly to have anything to do with cold water. It was as wise as it was discreet of the many men who at once started off right or left in search of a bridge : for those who remained behind, and essayed to follow hounds, only made up a tableau that was positively humiliating. One after another rode desperately at the insignificant water jump,

Worshipping the watery idol, dreaming hopes
Delicious to the soul, but fleeting vain ;

and one after another had to retire baffled or to slide or swerve into the muddy stream. Such whacking, spurring, objurgating, such plaintive pleading, and such broad round oaths. “Never refused before in his life !” “Oh, you fiend, why will you never jump water ?” “For Heaven’s sake, old friend, give me a lead, *do ! !*” Hounds clean out of sight, and we may be here till morning. Oh, that I had an ox goad, or a sword—or else a better temper ! A whole Leicestershire field pounded by 12 feet of water ! At length some one lands well on the farther rail ; and the example animates the horse of one other to surmount the open jump, breaking the bank both in taking off and landing (who are the successful ones, it is impossible to note in the confusion *). Even this is not enough

* Mr. Brooks, jun., of Whatton, it afterwards transpired, was the first to break the spell.

to stimulate the remainder of the stubborn beasts, still plunging and refusing on the brink; till at last a shallow spot is discovered, a rail broken down—and they slink pitifully through.

Over the brow and not a mile away, the pack were casting about, already at fault—else might they have run to the Coplow unattended. Now it required the help of the huntsman to carry them round by Quenby to Lowesby. Here they ran up to a tiny spinney, and here, as in the morning, their fox had lain down to wait for them. Up he jumped in their very midst; took a turn round the little plantation—every hound screaming for his blood—then turned back to charge right through them. Hungry jaws snapped at him right and left; but he dodged and twisted, jumped high in the air over one hound's head, and escaped them all! For a mile or more he was in view of some of the pack, as he dashed past the place where he was found; and now went on to do better credit to himself. Leaving Lowesby Hall on his right, he took them at a cheery pace over several wide pastures; crossed the Tilton and Leicester road close to what is known at Thimble Hall, and dropped over the slope for the village of Twyford. Having descended far enough to round a small farm of arable that might have stained the character of the line he now proposed, he bore to his left about half a mile from Twyford, and struck out a straight course over what is perhaps the pick of the Quorn country—viz., the firm well-drained grass on the side of the valley which holds Ashby Folville and Twyford. With a much improved scent they went excellently along this pretty slope, left Ashby well on the right, and then bore upward for Barsby. Firm and sound as was the galloping on this chosen ground, and light as were the fences, half an hour of such going had begun to tell its tale: and, when Barsby and South Croxton were passed, and the run turned down towards Baggrave Spinney, horses were blundering and falling at many simple places. After crossing the Croxton brook at a very amiable point, hounds came to a sudden check in a grass field (about an hour from the first find). Having at length given it up on their own

account, they were led quietly round forward—and up jumped Reynard, a second time, from their very midst! He had lain down in a furrow to catch his wind; and rose, apparently, much refreshed. For, with his brush still well up, he beat them for pace over half a dozen fields before getting back into the outskirts of South Croxton Village. The standing still for five minutes in the cold damp air had stiffened the tired limbs of many a confidential—or, may be groggy—mount: and those few final and unexpected fences were now quite discreditably smashed. Swallowtail is seen to turn an “imperial” over a most moderate piece of timber. Friends and relatives nearly ride over him, in their anxiety to render assistance, while “brown gelding Confidence, aged, perfect fencer, and fast,” walks about on the top of him; and at last stands quite still with owner between his forelegs—a tragic burlesque on the pose of the Arab steed and his stricken master. “Poor fellow, he *must* be badly hurt! He can’t get up!” And sympathising comrades hurry up, flask in hand, and horror on their countenances—to find Swallowtail laughing and protesting loudly, as he sits with his leather-clad legs extended and his face close to Confidence’s nose. “Hey! somebody! come and take the great brute off me! He’s got his feet on my coat-tails! I’m sitting right in a pool of water!” Sure enough, Confidence had got him firmly pinned down by both tails—and, remembering, the many, visitations of long and ruthless spurs, apparently meant to keep him there.

Meanwhile, the bristling pack had chivvied their fox up to the village; and run into him as he reached a cottage garden.

With heartfelt sorrow has the news of Lord Helmsley’s sad death been received by the many who knew, and hunted with, him in Leicestershire. To a charm of manner and a kindness of disposition seldom seen, he united a keen love of a pursuit that in itself is genial and unselfish. To know him was to feel drawn towards him; and his friendship was as

consistent as it was pleasing. He was indeed a type of gentle unassuming nobility. His death forms a mournful sequel to that of his dear friend (the two having *many* characteristics in common)—to reach whose deathbed at Windsor he first brought on himself the seeds of an illness, that has now laid him low.

HARD AND FAST.

THE spur of the moment is the best persuader for Pegasus, the more so if he be a trifle stale, from over and constant driving. Saturday, Jan. 7, exists till Sunday puts it out of memory, or Monday clouds it with new event, so let it be jotted down at once.

The Belvoir are in better form this season than for years past. The pack is more than ever worthy of its fame; the huntsman is keen, quiet, and persevering; and—as happens to be the case with each and all of the present establishments of the Shires—two excellent whips work heart and soul with their chief. On Saturday last a hard, smart field assembled at Piper Hole—the old walled park adjoining Goadby. The dazzling sunshine had power to blind, but none to warm. Men bit their fingers, at which a wild north-west wind had been beforehand. Some said What a fine day, others What a miserable one—as they had risen the right side of bed, or had sought slumber tardily or in vain. But that sharp, crisp air meant scent and sport, in spite of a bullying wind that eddied round the hateful beaver, and pierced through any waistcoat that covered less than fourteen stone. Sun is often credited with power to spoil sport. It is never a *cause*, though it may often be an accompaniment, of a want of sport—as in dusty March.

The wooded hollow of Old Hills was drawn, first through the medium of cracking whipecord (while a straining pack—the little ladies—shivered and whimpered with impatience on the bleak hillside), afterwards by running the pack through the gully. Nothing came of it but an opportunity of marking

how workmanlike a company was present, and how that company was rapidly and surely testifying to an open winter and their own energy, through the medium of features disfigured and beauty spoiled. It is scarcely correct to go out in January, 1882, without a closed or discoloured eye, a battered nose, or cheeks whereon no razor could wander uninterrupted. The smooth cheek of youth—or protracted youth—is a field that the blackthorn of Leicestershire dearly loves. I remember one who fought and bled copiously amid its prickly paths for some seasons—down whose flushed cheeks the hot drops of gore were wont regularly to course each other, in sympathy with the heel taps, freely flowing aftergirth. He went to Cheshire; and his face in spring was as of a newborn babe, unscarred, dishonourably smooth. “Why, friend of my youth, who taught me the force of Rugby rules and the kinship ‘twixt shin and leather, ‘tween broadcloth and monitorial discipline, what ails thee? Has thine ardour worn out or fell cowardice o’erta’en thee?” “Devil a bit,” said he, of the Tuscan type, in sorrow much rather than in anger. “They haven’t a bullfinch in the whole country!” But it has not been in the bull-finches alone that Leicestershire’s bright lights have of late been so nearly and generally extinguished. Sore legs, deep ground, and the miserable impossibility of Master stopping at home, have had a great deal more to do with it: and *hinc illæ lachrymæ*, or, as the little boys of Melton translate it, “Oh my eye, ‘e’s been a knocking ‘is boopeep!”

Passing on, as dignity should prompt, from the vulgarism of these School Board inquisitors, it may be noted as an apropos parenthesis that in to-day’s experience we either jumped clean or fell fairly. The hedges all stood level, if they stood strong. You cleared the top or you caught it. You might break your hat; but you never tore your bows—a sentence that should offer itself to the critics of the provinces like a minnow to a shoal of perch. But I may cite the following few names to prove that the faculty of horsemanship was fairly represented—Lord Grey de Wilton, Lord Cloncurry, Lord Rocksavage,

Colonel Ewart, Major Worsley, Captains Starkey, Middleton, Smith, Rhoades, Tennant, Longstaff, Trevor, Messrs. Harter, Parker, Brocklehurst, Adair, Pennington, Lubbock, Brand, Flower, Fenwick, Forester, Hume, &c., &c.

A little spinney stands by the roadside halfway between Melton and Scalford—takes its name from the latter place—and, though only an acre big, generally holds a fox. People in the road head him back. What matter? The whip has hounds away with another somewhere—where? A scream comes down the wind, and the best experience of life—a flying start—is upon us. Ride, go, grip him tight! *Plough*, by all that's unholy! Yonder they flit in the swimming sunshine, like flying fish on the glistening sea. Lord Rocksavage did not come down here to sleep at the covertsides; and he is round the corner and over the blind fence beyond, with a hundred yards and a galloping horse to the good. Bang, rattle, and clatter! That chesnut never did this over the clean Cottesmore bullock-grounds! Not hurt, sir? Your legs are clear of the stirrups, and it's beautiful falling—as I'll explain in the cool midday when excusing the double dig of the spur which followed your cropper. Captain Smith rides ten stone, and something in pounds. The grey is up to fifteen of the former quantity, and may have to carry more: so he can till the plough to a merry tune. Deep, deep it is for three fields, till a leftward turn throws hounds across the road for Melton Spinney; and another van, with Gillard at the head, takes up the running. Mr. Harter seizes time by the fetlock (*sic sweet and sporting seventeen*); and, claiming a quick garden in-and-out for his own, leads a pursuit to the Melton Brook—the pack still fully forward. Their hedges may be clean here, and their timber honest—but it is a blunt strong honesty by no means easy to overcome. Not a jump at the Melton Brook? Sad indeed—and how we hug ourselves as we gallop under a railway arch, to find we have bridged a bit of water that would frighten no one outside the vaunted midlands. Along the brookside to Melton Spinney—hounds go beautifully, field ditto, gates all

the way, as should be in a well-regulated country. Were I Dictator Gladstone for one year, it should be enacted that every landlord be held responsible for his gates swinging and latching easily in accordance with the progress of the age, that every sheep-dog should be imprisoned under reasonable suspicion from October to May, and that intellectual indoor pursuits should be insisted upon with a view to the education of the lower agricultural classes, between 11 a.m. and darkness during the same months. In return for this, I would insist on that section of the liveried class known as second-horsemen leaving the polemical line of action, which so often brings them within measurable distance of conflict with the sons of the soil—I would have them all paraded at the meet (sandwich-boxed, well-mannered, and unspurred), to be trotted along the roads in charge of one responsible keeper. The latter, it is true would occupy about as enviable a position as a commissary-general in a campaign ; and he would be a genius indeed if he passed a pleasant hour between one and two p.m. But if His Grace and Gillard would surrender an old and valued associate, General Chambers might surely assume with credit and safety the post of Chief of the Staff to the Belvoir field.

But this is very much by the way ; and the way had reached Melton Spinney. Without touching this, hounds passed round and beyond to enter on the waste of plough, stretching thence to Brentingby Spinnies. The Thorpe Arnold Brook lies in the first valley : and a useless wire has for many years guarded its tempting bank. Only a shout of dread and warning, evolved from the experience of a previously burnt child, called attention to the iniquitous iron, hidden as it was in thorn and sunshine. How good the scent, was proved by the way hounds carried it over acre after acre of deep dirt. Nearing Waltham, they reached grass and pace again ; and six-in-a-line was the result of a single trap—two men of class being carried off at the nose by an overhanging bough, a third jumping among the débris ; and three others accepting the inevitable close by. The trifling check above Stonesby Ashes gave an opportunity

for timing—thirty minutes from the start. Three fields then, and next a fox jumping up from a hedgerow (was he beaten or fresh? They all look fresh when roused). Pace, plough, and follow-on to Croxton Park—there to lose, as oft-times before, at Launde Hollow, where earths and rabbit holes exist unmolested. One hour, to a minute or so, from the start, and a six-mile distance to any point in the last fifteen minutes.

Passing over unsuccessful trifles, we come to the merry scuffle from a new plantation near Saxby, time of starting



FRANK GILLARD.

3.45. Two foxes away in view, and the pack laid on for Freeby Village. Past here and to Freeby Wood is a tract seldom tried—but *very* happy in all the ingredients of hunt and ride. Goodly grass and capital fences—hounds really going. What more would you have for an exciting ten minutes, and a total twisting forty-five, to ground by moonlight near Freeby Wood? Particulars not needed. Lord Grey de Wilton seemed to be cutting the way in the early burst; while Captain Smith, Miss

Chaplin and her pilot, were far nearest the executive in the quick later half of a sterling, short-turning gallop.

Going back to Friday, January 6th, when the Quorn held a stormy lawn meet at Quenby Hall, we find a day chiefly noticeable for wild wind and its eccentric effects. One fox ran into the midst of hounds in Botany Bay and stood and snarled at his unexpected foes; another, put up in the open, fairly charged the pack and the whole body of horsemen, to his own destruction. Everyone got thoroughly drenched in a five-minutes' waterspout before hounds were put into covert; but this was not nearly enough for the ardour of two smart Meltonians, who, in a brief quick circle from the Coplow, followed it up with a header into a pond twelve feet deep! A strong palisade stood on the jumping side; the driving wind prevented their seeing further; so, with both spurs in, they went for the pond—though the water was green and cold, and not over clean. The clever part of the feat lay with the earlier victim; who rescued himself, his horse, and his hat, in time to be sailing away in the distance, as Jack o' Lantern to his successor. But a man who has graduated through a shop window with no worse results than a bill for glass and pipe-stems, can afford to play at fish torpedo; and, after the first half-choked explosion, to treat the feat as a merry jest. Cautious friends, peering over the timber, were much exercised at the length of time one of the performers was able to remain under water. But beyond their sympathetic anxiety at the moment, and the revulsion of feeling which moved them to hysterical laughter immediately afterwards, nothing really serious came of the catastrophe. It was not a good day's sport. How could it be under a half-hurricane? But twenty minutes' grass galloping from Barkby Holt (to lose at Quenby) brought warmth and consolation in the afternoon.

A ROUGH LINE.

THE Quorn have had their turn again : and in the week of present chronicle have achieved success, distinct and prolonged, on each occasion of taking the field in their grass country. The most perfect hunting weather has blessed them—a bounty of course shared in common with other packs. But the Quorn are in a vein of luck, as well as in the height of form, this glorious open season of '81-82. Nothing succeeds like success ; and very few weeks of the present winter have seen them without notable event to register. They have been fortunate in their days, and fortunate, as a rule, in their foxes ; and the result is the best season they have known for years.

Only a small party saw Lord Aylesford's covert drawn on Friday afternoon, Jan. 18—but this party was made of the best and keenest material, and each man was mounted on a horse that so far had only done second-horseman's work (in itself, perhaps, a varying and uncertain quantity). Among the little band, for instance, were the Master, Lord Manners, Colonels Forester and Gosling, Captains Boyce, Smith, and Middleton, Messrs. Harter, Praed, Parker, Flower, Palmer, Behrens, Martins, &c., &c.—and heartily they had to ride for the first twenty minutes away from Lord Aylesford's. An unusual—not a perfect, but a very pleasant—line was run with a bold strong fox. Turned at first from his original and ultimate point, the Belvoir Vale or Curate's Gorse, he kept along the upper ground to Thrussington Wolds—some fifteen minutes of little fields, big fences, and a strong scent. A rough style of agriculture would seem to prevail on this cold upland. The hedges are chiefly tangled bullfinches, the ditches are even in January mostly choked with yellow grass, the plough is in many instances a wild waste of twitch, while the grass is wet, sedgy, and undrained. Wide and independent rode the first line—"a captain, a lord, and a com-

moner bold" leading respectively the right, the centre, and the left. Little time to note anything but how the pack may bend, or which pilot it seems safest to follow. A bad choice to take the one on the right. In common fairness he ought to have fallen, or at least pecked—and given you a chance of declining that ugly trap ! 'Twixt plough and plough it is surely enough to have a blind ditch and a high black bull-finck ! What possible object can there be in adding a wide deep dyke beyond ? The leader swishes through the topmost thorns ; the great chesnut shaking his well-caparisoned head and flinging himself far into space—and the two sail onwards with stride and equanimity in no way disturbed. It is otherwise with next comer. With every wish to decide for himself whether the fence opposed to him comes within the standard he has rigidly laid down for himself, he suddenly finds himself impelled by the force of example and the rush of a headstrong steed, to essay a flight to which his wildest fancy would not have prompted him. Heart in mouth, he counts his horse's strides as he nears the first grass-grown ditch. With straining eyeballs he measures the wide chasm he has just descried beyond—while the thought flashes through him, Is there a plough team near ? Has he a half-sovereign in his pocket ? A groan of relief escapes him as he lands in safety ; and, turning round in his saddle, he notes a third comer sailing leisurely down upon the breakers. "Put on the pace !" he shouts with mistaken zeal to his well-loved elder—with result that his words are not caught, but the black mare nearly is. Her veteran rider had checked, rather than hurried her, to the cry. He wanted no " office," certainly never knew any fear ; and the warning nearly brought about the consequence it was meant to avert. His mild rebuke, " You shouldn't call out when one is going at a fence !" serves to point a moral as it has been called in to adorn my tale.

Two sportsmen abreast were nearly torn off their horses at another highgrown fence ; and then hounds were to be seen piercing the narrow belt of plantation that runs between the

wood of Thrussington Wolds and the cross roads of Six Hills. In and out of this was a creep and a scramble in which it was far better to come sixth or seventh than earlier—after which the chase went hotly on across the Fosse-road, and Ellar's Gorse was soon neared. Bearing again to the right the field suddenly found that Old Dalby was close to them, and that they were embarked on the best grass slope of the Belvoir Vale, with their heads for Broughton. The pace freshened up again ; and they galloped on as far as Broughton Station. Here their fox had crossed and recrossed the railway at the very station—and it was mainly through Colonel Gosling's ready help that, for the second time in the day, the pack escaped destruction from a passing train. Fifty minutes to here—and a capital sporting hunt. The rest may be briefly told. The sharp double back of the fox across the line was curiously and cleverly unravelled by the pack, quite untouched. They then hunted on to within a short half mile of The Curate—which their fox had just been seen to enter. But The Curate was to be Monday's chief draw—to-day was Friday—and there would be few other coverts to fall back upon if The Curate failed. So the Master was compelled to deny hounds the blood they so truly deserved—and a right good day's sport ended.

THE RIDERLESS RUN.

FEBRUARY 4TH, 1882.

THE day of the past week has been Monday (January 30th) with the Quorn—but, by no means with pride and pleasure alone, can one sit down to sketch its outline. Humiliation and disappointment have necessarily as large a share in the feelings of the *raconteur* as they had at the time in those of the miserable many of which he was an insignificant item. The Quorn hounds had two good runs—morning and afternoon respectively. That of the morning was in itself simply magni-

ficient—and of it not a soul saw more than an odd mile or so! For about an hour and five minutes hounds ran fiercely over a beautiful country, virtually unaccompanied. You shall hear how this happened—and then the bitter memory shall be buried as soon as possible.

You may remember how the weather changed with the end of last week, how a deluge of rain fell on Sunday, and how Monday broke with a cold drizzling fog, that drifted before a sluggish east wind. We met at Widmerpool New Inn; tramped the slush of the old Fosse road to the Widmerpool coverts; and rolled through the sucking clay of the centre ride of Roehoe, where no sound awakened the hollow wood but the blobbing of hoofs and the huntsman's tuneful pleading that the gods would give him a fox. It was not till the Home Wood was reached that his appeal met with response. A holloa somewhere; hounds feathering and flashing in covert; a lot of excited mortals in the road; "two foxes across into the laurels;" and then a merry blast as if the bellows of Vulcan were at play on that battered bit of brass. Hounds stream into the laurels; huntsman and half the field dash in after them; Master and the other half gallop round the drive, and enter the wire-fenced park as the hounds swing out past Widmerpool Hall. The far side of the little park has its wire railing, and its iron gate not to be opened hurriedly. Along the left runs a chasmed stream, that is neither to be forded nor jumped; but as yet the driving pack is pointing parallel to this thrice accursed gulf. Mr. Coupland appears to recognize the geography and its dangers; but not one of his hearers ever dreams that his prophecy "If they cross the water we are done" can be pregnant with such fatal truth; and the party gallop on, hoping and trusting, either that the line may keep this nearer side of the stream or that there yet may be a way across. That the field of to-day held men who meant to ride to hounds, and who could see any run that was to be seen, you shall judge from among the following names—Mr. Coupland, Duke of Portland, Lords Belper, Clonecurry, Newark, Counts Kinsky,

and Larische, Colonel Chippindall, Captains Boyce, Smith, Middleton, Molyneux, Henry, Messrs. Adair, Beaumont, E. Chaplin, Parker, Rose, Blacker, Charlton, Knowles, Selby, Brand, Moseley, Cradock, Geary, Younger, Martin (2), F. S. Stanley, Smith, Brewster, and Downs, besides several ladies who can really ride to hounds.

Well, the pack *did* suddenly cross the bottom; my doleful history is fairly embarked, and I must be allowed to deck it as I go with such incident as appears to have fallen to the lot of those who had even a brief passing share in the run. I can still see the maddened despairing throng bleating up and down the bank of that impassable Styx—see them as I have seen them in daylight and in dream ever since, whether when I have slunk with head averted on the outskirts of Cottesmore and Belvoir field, shunning the hot cross-fire of quip and question; or when in the still darkness tied, again and again, on to the back of a nightmare whose head bored steadily into the hateful chasm. They seemed paralysed with the hopelessness of the situation—no bridge, no ford in front, behind them a quarter of mile of wire fencing, and the pack flitting rapidly out of sight into the foggy distance. For a long time they would not even accept the position as impossible, and retrace their steps to get out of it. So with most of them their experience of the morning's sport ended then and there. Mr. Adair, Captain Middleton, and the Duke of Portland were the first to rush back, to clear the carriage drive, and gallop through the village along the road to Willoughby—with a result that we shall see. Meanwhile a slender scattering of the field had kept outside the Park, its wire and its unbridged gully; and joined the pack as it crossed the latter and the parallel road to Wysall. Willoughby Gorse lies some two miles away; and thither these latter rode a nice line—Mr. Martin (of Rempstone) and Mr. Brand on the right-hand side of the Willoughby Brook, Captain Molyneux, Mr. Brewster, and one or two others on the left (I write of course as I could glean, and must be allowed at least a fair margin for error). Without actually entering the Gorse,

hounds flew along its lower border, and rounding the village of Willoughby, with their small following just able to keep them in sight in the misty atmosphere. Turning leftward beyond the village, they crossed the grass-sided road which leads to Melton; and, running alongside it for nearly two miles, gave such horsemen as were within hail an excellent chance of recovering ground. Thus Captain Middleton, and subsequently the Duke and Mr. Adair, were enabled to get alongside, and jump into the fields to join them, with the other few men who had been with hounds to Willoughby Gorse. Ere reaching the Fosse Road, the pack bore away still more to the left as if for Upper Broughton in the distance; and then, when running their hardest, suddenly left the pleasant grass meadows for a short succession of deep little fields of plough. Over this they could travel far faster than horses; and, as the fog thickened, they grew less and less distinct, till at length it was only by their piping voices that their direction could be followed at all. Even the sound grew less tangible as the arable was left, and men were once more riding on sound grass. The tinkle of the music was no longer in front: it was dimly audible now and again, somewhere—apparently to the right. But difficult as it is to ride by ear even in a woodland, it is ten times more difficult in a stiff country; and though those who could catch the sound rode on in desperation, they rode in baffled uncertainty—skirmishing in every direction, and shouting now and again to one another for help or suggestion. To bring matters to a culminating point of difficulty, they suddenly found themselves confronted with another fenced stream that could not have been jumped—had hounds been visible fifty yards beyond and all Leicestershire burning to be with them. To break down some strong rails at one point, to tear down the barricaded gate of a broken bridge at another, was all a work of time—and led only to the blank acknowledgment that the pack was now utterly lost to both view and hearing. A sharp, sudden turn to the right had carried the hounds off in the direction of Old Dalby, just at the moment when the few men

who had hitherto succeeded in keeping a hold upon them were entangled in the plough and when the fog was at its thickest. Now the line of chase would appear to have travelled awhile towards Six Hills, before bending once more to the left above Old Dalby—whose village and wood nestle in the westernmost corner of the Vale of Belvoir. For, as the discomfited stragglers in pursuit worked their way forward, by gap, gate, and road to Old Dalby, they came upon one grinning rustic after another to welcome them gleefully with the same news : “ The dogs is gone for Dalby Wood this twenty minutes—and never a hunter nigh ‘em. Never see such a thing i’ my loife ! They *was* a going it. They’ll be at Holwell Mouth by now ! ”—and all this emphasised with chuckle and guffaw that under the miserable circumstances were perfectly maddening. Yes, hounds had dipped into the steep narrow valley, and risen the hillside again through Dalby Wood—here to be met by Mr. Brewster and some other rider, who had kept along the upper road. By Wartnaby to Holwell Mouth these two were able to accompany them without difficulty, the line for the most part taking the light plough alongside the road. And at Holwell Mouth this great and curious run ended by a gallant fox getting to ground in a rabbit-burrow. It was another hour before the field got together again ; and it will be many a day before they wipe out the memory of this riderless run.

From Widmerpool Hall to Holwell Mouth is a full six-mile point ; and, as hounds went, the ground covered must have been at least ten miles—while pace and scent are spoken for by the time, distance, and the fact of hounds running thus alone over both grass and plough.

To turn for the moment to a pleasanter theme, and passing over the unhappy accident of chopping a fox in Grimston Gorse. Next to Shoby Scoles is a little spinney, in a valley difficult to command, either by whip, huntsman, or jealous starter. A fox had stolen away ; and it required two grass fields for hounds to take to the scent in earnest. Then, while they made up their minds to run, we had to make up ours

—or to prompt that of others—to wade a swamp, and clamber a strong fence, that only stout spurs and a western education could render feasible. This was the first day of an east wind; and to see our boldest friend come back with his horse under the muddy water was in itself a chilly warning to be accepted with decisive promptitude. But a general crawl-through was achieved somehow; then did hounds settle, and so did a field that was bent on rectifying the accident and mistakes of the morning. On the way to Hoby it happened that this ready fox was headed back to hounds; and they thus gained a minute or two on him as they bore down upon Asfordby. To creep a stream and gallop a plough was all by the way, before he turned almost back across the Shoby lordship, to cruise among the green fields of that parish and its undulating neighbour of Grimston—grand ground to ride over, so long as a horse can breathe and remember his duty to a top binder. Downs was riding an evident flyer from the Newport Lodge stable; Captain Boyce was laughing at the wet ground on the old black Gamekeeper, and Mr. Blacker was making the best of one of his earliest English mounts. Which is better falling—timber or blackthorn grower? Reasoning power points to the timber (no ditch). Cowardice eyes the thorn binder (may break); and looks round for a lead. Lead comes gallantly at the rail—refuses horribly. Cowardice mounted on youth is close at his heels; pulls round at once; sings his own dirge in best Anglo-Saxon; and sets his teeth, spurs, elbows, and undisciplined young one, at alternative binders. “Now you’re down you shall remember the occasion, my friend.” Whack, crack, whipcord and welt. This is discipline and higher education—and I have full liberty for quoting the wholesome instance, also for conferring (or, to be honest, adopting) the *nom de guerre* of the teacher. The young one gets up more willingly than he got down—and would rather not do it again. “Cruelty to animals,” indeed! Did they ever think of that when they pulled me across a desk, because Latin grammar didn’t happen to suit my bent of mind?

Thus, or more or less thus, [to Grimston Gorse—as cheery a twenty-five minutes' curl as you want to see. Then twenty-five minutes more—rounding a beaten fox; and then a second, more befitting, kill in Grimston Gorse, to end a great day's sport. At least I dare to term it so, though fortune, fog, accident, and ill-management made the chief event so deep a disappointment.

HUNT WE MUST.

THE Quorn saved their Monday (Feb. 6th) by an afternoon gallop—blew a fire out of an apparently empty grate—and went home in good spirits. It so happens that they have killed their foxes very freely—though very fairly—in their Monday country; *e.g.*, no less than two brace in, and about, Grimston Gorse alone. Small coverts and dead gorses are all they have to depend upon—and these will not stand the strain. Foxes lie out; the farmers leave them duly unmolested; and they naturally prefer a good quiet hedgerow to a hollow brake that smells week by week of the foxhound. So it is often difficult indeed to find them; and more than half of Monday (a superlative hunting day, too) was spent in vain quest.

Wartnaby Hall is quite a Melton meet—but so situated that, though difficult of attainment from Leicester, it is yet within reach of many from the Belvoir, Cottesmore, and South Notts countries. All three Hunts were strongly represented to-day, and from the last-named came Mrs. Chaworth-Musters, to renew acquaintance with the country in which she was for long so prominent and so graceful a figure—also Miss Musters and Mr. and Miss Sherbrooke. Altogether, it was as bright—and certainly as big—a field as the Quorn ever called together on what we are accustomed to consider the less crowded side of the Wreak. Ample opportunity indeed was given for discovering this as the long cavalcade squeezed, groaned, and looked

pleasant through a succession of hard gates the narrowest and most inconvenient imaginable. Fortunately, Monday always brings with it a fresh accession of good-humour, as certainly as it does of hope and keenness. The world that may have looked black, unfriendly, and unpromising, to a mind relaxed and a frame o'er done, as the week's excitement and fatigue came towards its end, offers a very different prospect to the man who comes kicking fresh to the covertsides on a hunting Monday morn. The fact is, many of us are apt to hunt too much—too much, I mean, to allow of each day wearing its very happiest aspect. But then, who is going to stop at home when the weather is open and there is a horse to go? No, not I—not any other to whom the daily toil is such a true labour of love. Life is very short and has many uncertainties. As long as fox-hunting is a certainty and a sure delight, 'twould be madness, absolute sin, to neglect a day's opportunity. That such negligence is rare, is shown by the monster fields increasing and accumulating daily. England might be at the zenith of its prosperity or have arrived at an epoch of universal wealth: for never were so many people seen out hunting—or so regularly. They groan and lament on every hand, it is true, that their stables are but hospitals. But day by day they never fail to put in an appearance with two sound horses suitable to position and requirements—or occasionally more so. Has all Leicestershire pledged its birthright? Or has everyone but your humble and penniless servant inherited a sudden fortune? "Messrs. Tattersall . . . without reserve . . . a gentleman unable to hunt next season . . . &c., &c." Oh, my prophetic soul, my uncle! A kingdom—yes, a pound of flesh, if ribs would afford it—for a horse! This is the maxim now. Consequences hereafter, to be gazetted in due course.

But of Monday. Welby Fishponds, Saxelby Wood, Grimston Gorse, Lord Aylesford's and Dalby Wood, one after the other blank; merriment all dead or dying; and the frugality of the sandwich box duly honoured. Then a long trip to

Willoughby Gorse ; and full discussion by the way on the great unriden run from Widmerpool of the week previous—every mouth watering at the sight of the sweet country over which hounds must have careered by themselves. At Willoughby a fine fox set the field in a fever ; and then—found some open mouth leading to the bowels of the earth. Anyhow, hounds could never touch him after he reached the road three hundred yards from the covert. And in melancholy frame we waded along the Fosse Road for Walton Thorns. A fox for sixpence —no, for a penny—they are very still, and 'twas but a little whimper. A fox for a *hundred* ! A fox for every one of my sound horses and cripples !! Nearly four o'clock on a Monday afternoon—and the blood glows in each man's face as if he had been-robed of such music for a month. How they scrambled out to the yokel's notice that the fox was over the plough for Burton ; and how they tore back to surround the covert as soon as they realised that hounds were far from away, and that Mr. Cradock's good covert contained another fox ! As with most things, there is a right side and a wrong side to Walton Thorns. In spite of the penning throng, this second fox broke rightly—and a capital half-hour saved the day. Ten rapid minutes of plough he gave us, before reaching the Thrussington grass : then the scene changed on to ground as glorious for hound as it is for horseman. I have often written—probably to reiteration—of the broad bullock-fields of the Hoby lordship, stretching down to the valley of the Wreake—ever holding a brilliant scent, and as firm to the tread as fair to the leap. There are one or two gullies and bottoms that *may* come in the way ; but, as hounds ran to-day, each difficulty was exactly avoided. The ridge and furrow came smoothly ; the fences seem to have been shorn of much of their lofty strength, and the ox rails to have fallen to decay, since first we used to ride it. Do you remember that thrusting burst from Cossington Gorse some ten years ago, when the Prince of Wales made his earliest acquaintance wth the Quorn country by riding over it through two inches of snow ? If so, you will easily call to mind how

five of the giants of that day fell in a row at a single oxe. To-day the same fence was a low plain stake-and-bound with which fifty people toyed easily! *Tempora mutantur*—and 'tis just as well that such fences, as well as we, should do so too.

Twenty-six minutes let us know how warm and close was this afternoon; for at Hoby Rectory we felt as in a vapour bath. Here it seemed as though our fox had availed himself of an earth that has long existed in the rectory garden; but in a few moments he was holloaed on and twice headed; and then, when quite beat, his life was saved under the confusion of information. He is best alive: for a bold fox that knows such a line of country can ill be spared.

LIFE AND DEATH.

MARCH 11TH, 1882.

WHAT is sad in my chapter must be at its end. To commence in sorrow would be to cast a cloud over a story that is nothing if it has no gladness—and whose subject was ever the brightest joy of the long life that has passed.

A Gallop with the Quorn. This is all I have to tell. But an instance is better than a catalogue—a sketch than a mere list of pictures at a distance—an hour's run than a week, a year, of routine existence.

The Quorn have had many a good burst, many a hearty run, in the happy season that is now so nearly over. But not since November a gallop to compare with this—not through the winter, I think, a better. That autumn treat of thirty-five minutes from Parson's Gorse to Hose Village was of a similar class; and there were two October runs—the one from Lord Moreton's, to Baggrave and beyond, the other from Gadesby Spinney to Burrough-on-the-Hill—that for continued pace and delightful country would bear comparison. The great Widmerpool disaster of January we may wipe out in

mortification and regret: and here we come to an end of the parallels that even the exceptional season of 81-82 can furnish. From Walton Thorns, exactly an hour to ground (near Cream Gorse)—the first *thirty-two minutes without a check*, and the whole over a fine country—this was Monday's run; and here is its fuller outline, as far as I can give it.

Six Hills the meet—but why so small an one? Was it because a blank Monday had once been recorded; or that stables are really in such straits that even a Sunday's rest will not help the ball to roll on again on Monday? A few were watching anxiously and sadly in Melton; but from all the country round the Hunt and its neighbours were, if worthily yet thinly, gathered. Six Hills, it is true, is far from Leicester, and farther still from Nottingham; and a Quorn Monday always offers a pleasing contrast to its giant Friday. But it is not often I dare attempt to name even a Monday field; and here is a list that, without pretending to be complete, will yet include quite three-fourths of those who mustered at Six Hills—Mr. Coupland and Miss Webster, Captain and Mrs. Ashton, Mr. and Mrs. Younger, Mr. and Miss Story, Mr. and Miss Fenwick, Mr. and Miss Brooks (of Whatton), Mrs. Grenfell, Miss Wynn, Miss Amphlett, Lord Cloncurry, Lord Manners (fresh from his grand military triumphs), Lord Lanesborough, Sir A. Palmer, Sir A. Scott, Major Stirling, Captains Smith, A. and F. Henry, Boyce, Molyneux, Starkie, Grimston, Moseley, Messrs. Adair, Baldock, J. Behrens, W. Boden, Brand, Alfred Brocklehurst, Black, Cecil Chaplin, Ernest Chaplin, J. Cradock, Harrison, Hames, Harter, Knowles, G. Farnham, A. Martin, R. Martin, W. Paget, O. Paget, Parker, Praed, Pryor, Rose, F. Sloane-Stanley, Wade.

The morning was dull and breezy, at first almost stormy in its rough darkness. Walton Thorns, a strong blackthorn covert of perhaps a dozen acres, lies about a mile from the meet. Though a ploughed waste spreads out beyond and behind it, Walton Thorns has all its old and high associations in connection with the great grass country, easily reached

southward towards the valley of the Wreake—and this was to be the scene to-day. The field obeyed orders, and lined the lower ride ; that Reynard, if at home, might be encouraged to trip it in the right direction. "Rather sharp upon your covert," was the Master's remark—for hounds had touched it twice on the Monday previous, bringing with them the noise and clatter of the chase from the spinney adjacent. "Not if they find," was the owner's prophetic answer. But there was no sound yet, and hounds had been ten minutes in covert. Huic holloa! Huic holloa ! George is screaming lustily at the top! Now we are off. 12.55. Button your coat and pray for a scent. The ground is wet, the air is keen, and the bitches are away at his brush. Up the middle ride and out beyond, to find the pack has a happy hedgerow between it and the rushing horse-men. But, crossing the lane, the latter have a moment's opportunity, of which consideration for neither Master nor their own sport will hinder their availment. Into them, over them ! When *will* you learn, good sir, to ride *after* a pack, not *among* it—still less *through* it ? You get envied by no one, praised of none, hated by the huntsman, and abused by a hundred suffering neighbours. This is not personal ; for it is not meant to apply to a singular instance, but to a practice only too prevalent and pronounced, hateful and selfish. But the ladies are not to be knocked off their heads just now. They fling to the front with a recklessness that is one of the best attributes of a foxhound ; and drive over three fields of plough in a way that tells at once of the scent before them. Now they are over the bottom, and free for the moment from further interruption. For *many* moments, too. We know it well—that Cossington Bottom, winding wickedly down the valley, half way 'twixt the coverts of Walton and Thrussington. Deep banked and strong fenced, its waters have cut out a gulf that only narrows here and there to jumping dimensions. No chance of crossing it where hounds have done—and men sheer hurriedly off to the right to seek a more promising spot. "That will do, where the bushes are low. I know the place

—and next minute the spokesman and his stout chesnut are unravelling themselves from the tanglement of a turn-over—living sermons on the text of “a little knowledge” a “dangerous” possession. The watercourse is certainly small enough here ; but it has chosen this spot to bend outwards from its bordering fence, and to run some three yards wide of its screen. The trap catches at least another of our list of captains above : then the screen is broken down, and the rest walk quietly through, and over—while some few hit off a less treacherous spot a little distance on the right. The hounds, meanwhile, have risen the hill, racing out of sight, and leaving three deep fields of fresh-growing seeds behind them. The next glimpse of the moving scene shows the pack a wide wheatfield beyond the Leicester Road, Mr. Adair just jumping the blind fence out of it, and six in scarlet racing up to the fluttering covert-coat in front. Whip and spur, leg and rein, the pack are hardly to be kept in sight. Stop for a gate, while an easy fence is beside it ? Not for a moment. But the plausible hedgerow hides a chasm twice as ugly as the previous trap : and only in the last stride is the broad deep gulf at all visible. The good chesnut leading lands safe, though the bank shivers and crumbles under his hind legs ; and a wave of the rider’s hand sends Captain Molyneux and Captain Smith to the easy-opening gate close by. Mr. Harter, however (who, with Mr. Pryor, had jumped the Cossington Bottom rather wide to the right), now making up ground hand over hand, also finds himself over the gulf before he can take a pull. But that symmetrical brown is the envy of the county ; and is certainly not likely to fall over what another horse can jump. So he too is away in safety—the hounds still glancing forward a field and a half in front. They are plain to be seen skirting the bottom of Thrussington Gorse, diving into the corner of Thrussington Wolds, and again emerging at once on to the grass below. Now for the Hoby Lordship, the apple of the Quorn eye, the pink of North Leicestershire. *Forrard*, you beauties, you shall lead us a dance to-day ! “ He’s not a field in front, and he’s

gone for Hoby!" "Thank you, my jolly man; that's news indeed, but don't holloa." "But I see'd him!" What better argument? Foxhunting will have lost its hold on the country, when working men look glumly at the passing chase, and refrain from shouting and running while breath will hold out. Past the right of Ragdale Hall—and miles of undulating grass in front. At last there are riders in the same field with the pack; for Mr. Brocklehurst has come with a rush on the little hog-maned chestnut, and Mr. Adair and Mr. Harter range alongside almost simultaneously. Down the gentle slope they ride for Hoby, with only easy flying fences in their path, and the best of firm turf underfoot. Once with hounds they have no difficulty in keeping with them over such ground—brilliant as is the scent. Firr and the Master are just joining the van, and rise at a strong stake-and-bound almost side by side. But while the former takes off from the top of a ridge, the latter has to jump out of a wet furrow, and meets with a crushing fall—breaking a rib, and sustaining severe bruises on frame and face. Swinging leftward up the hill to the Hoby and Ragdale road, the hounds cross it exactly where they are said to have done in the famous Bobtail Run of 1867, oft alluded to—when, starting as now from Walton Thorns, they ran this exact line and killed their fox unhelped in fifty-three minutes from the find. As they stream up the green hillside, their nearest followers are to be seen crossing another watery dingle, that must have stopped them all but for that lucky bridge. Captain Molyneux and Mr. E. Chaplin strike in from the upper ground; and these six seem to have the horizon to themselves. A village postman, who ought to have delivered his letters hours ago, has turned the fox fifty yards down the road (and, no doubt, held him away from Shoby Scoles as his point); but the scent is good enough to meet any such little difficulty, and the hunt moves on without delay. The village of Hoby is thus left three fields to the right; a farmer and all his merrie men, hearing the coming fray, have turned out to view Reynard struggling past the clump of trees which forms so prominent

a landmark hereabouts ; and again the air resounds with cheer and shout and bucolic greeting. The sun has burst forth from its black shroud, and is beating fiercely on the lathering horses. Close and intricate are the few fences immediately succeeding the road ; and the jumping power is not quite what it was. Why else should an open rivulet have caused a swerve, and man and steed to be rolling over together in the middle of a green meadow ? “ Get your wind, old horse ; and up again as soon as you’re ready.” Over the Knoll, and forward for Ashfordby—hounds running fast, but not so fiercely, till two fallow fields are passed. Then they strike the meadows by the brook-side (you may remember the spot where one of our champions was once sawn out of the willow tree, into which he and his horse had jumped ?), and drive gaily along them, pointing for Grimston Gorse. Headed in the next road, their beaten fox gives up all hope of making any point on the north of the Wreak ; so, bending to the right, he crosses the low meadows just short of Ashfordby. “ Friday Gorse ” used, I believe, to exist just here. I wish it were in being now ; for not only is a good covert sorely wanted, but the land occupiers would be more prepared for our coming. Mr. Harter meets with a sudden cracker over a wire ; and others avoid the same fate only through the warning. Down to the riverside the pack rush forward with their bristles up. Their fox has feared the water, and run back along the bank to Frisby. The miller is dancing and waving his hat on the bridge ; the whole village is screaming on the further bank as if Skobeleff were among them, instead of the wearied animal they are trying to mob. Thirty-two minutes to now, and not a ghost of a check by the way. Surely they’ll have him in a minute—and his blood will be worthily shed. But no ; he has crawled on through the village ; and we arrive, a hot and flurried company, to find huntsmen and hounds just tracking him out beyond the houses, and preparing to rise the hill above. Cream Gorse is about two miles away ; and, still on picked ground, this good fox travelled on as if that covert was to be his city of refuge

—the scent much slower since the village. But he knew of a drain about half a mile from the Gorse ; and, half full of water though it was, there he went to ground in safety.

I have said nothing of the distance covered. The run, indeed, does not base its chief merit on its point—though it has nothing to be ashamed of even on that head. From Walton Thorns to Frisby Village, covered in the first half hour, is four miles as the crow flies ; and there were, as I have tried to show to those who know the country, several turns on the way—notably, when the fox was twice foiled in crossing a road. Thus, up to Frisby hounds went at least six miles : and the extreme points of the whole run would be about that distance apart.

THE Earl of Wilton is dead : and sincerely and honestly we mourn the loss of one whom all our generation held in reverence and admiration, and that of our fathers in esteem. The King of Melton, the Patriarch of the Quorn Hunt, his had in every way been a leading spirit for fifty years. In his day the neatest and quickest of riders, all his life one of the most courteous of men—we had been brought up to regard him as a model of a sportsman, an example for a gentleman. Even during the present season, in his eighty-second year, he rode out more than once with hounds ; while within the last dozen years he could still dart along in a quick burst, and see his way in and out of a field more deftly and unerringly than men forty years junior to him. To the last days preceding his illness he is said to have enjoyed nothing more than to hear all about a run, when others came in from hunting. There was a gladness in his eye, a kindness in his greeting, that spoke feelingly of his sympathy with those whose vigour and youth gave them still a full share in the happiness of the sport. Great as had been his own part, he looked with true pleasure—never with grudging or contempt—on that taken by younger men : and he has gone out of the world with the affection and

regret of every one in Leicestershire. Surely on his tomb might be written the epitaph, as on that of John Bell of Brackenbury :

Gif thou be'st a better man in thy time than I was in mine,
Tak this stane off my wame and lay it upon thine.



THE LATE EARL OF WILTON.

CONCLUSION.

Once more the changed year's turning wheel returns
And as a girl sails balanced in the wind,
And now before and now again behind
Stoops as it swoops, with cheek that laughs and burns ;
So Spring comes merry towards me now, but earns
No answering smile from me, whose life is twined
With the dead boughs that Winter still must bind,
And whom to-day the Spring no more concerns.

APRIL 8TH, 1882.

THE above congenial sentiment of Dante Rosetti hits off the present situation of the hunting man with painful exactness.

No one is so insatiable, no one is so devoted to his chosen taste, and no one clings so absorbingly to it, as he who sets the chase on a pinnacle above all other pursuits in life. No wonder, then, he views the arrival of spring as an absolute calamity, none the less mournful that it is unavertable. To very many men (though few of them would, perhaps, confess it) the forthcoming months present an uneventful blank, during which they will live merely on recollection of the past and dreams of the future. Fortunately we are not all so situated ; but to everyone fond of hunting, loving its stirring incidents, and delighting in its social charms, there must be something melancholy in the knowledge that it has passed away from us —and men are very chary about speaking confidentially of plans and prospects for a “next season.” He can be only half keen who does not linger one moment, ere throwing for the last time his leg over the good steed’s neck ; who does not watch him wistfully till the stable door has closed upon him ; and who does not sigh as he kicks his well-worn hunting hat across the hall.

A flood of sunshine, in place of the too-usual deluge of rain, poured down upon the final celebration of the Melton season ; and the Hunt Steeplechases were a merry wake, in whose enactment it was difficult to perceive anything funereal. The season was dead ; but its life had been one of almost unexampled cheeriness. Why, then, should its memory be draped in black ? These Chases form the final reunion of all who have been hunting with the four packs of the district ; and the bright livery of the hunt servants offers a link with scenes so recent and eventful—if the dress of the riders generally is more in keeping with Newmarket than the covert-side. The Belvoir have had a season of thorough and continual sport : the Quorn perhaps the best on their books. Sir Bache has achieved very signal success, especially since the New Year ; and the Cottesmore, though for a long time out of luck, wound up with several runs quite up to their true form. So there was only congratulation to exchange, only a pleasant past to dwell

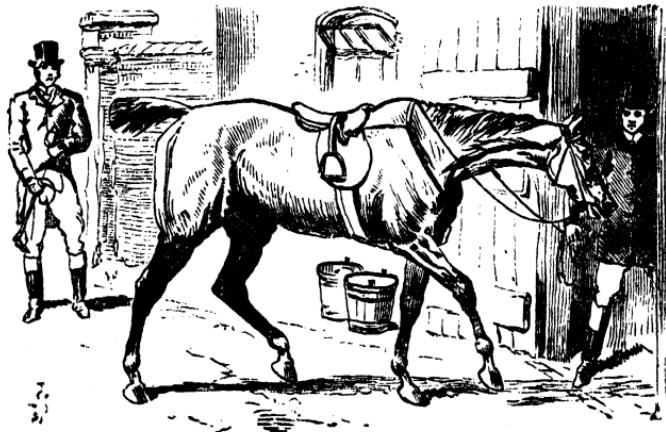
upon; and the meeting had all the spirit of a harvest home. It is part of our miserable nature that we cannot glean a full measure of fun and gladness from retrospect. Poets and prisoners extract much melancholy solace out of it: as, for that matter, they will equally out of any "sweet sorrow." But most of us, in our feverish ephemeral career, never look over our shoulder, let the past shift for itself, and even hurry the present so that we may skim on to some improbably pleasant and (it must be) exciting future. "Silver threads among the gold." Every tiny streak is a line of memory; only a grey head casts back and kills his beaten fox, while gilded youth flashes forward in vain. Golden Locks, Ambition, and Flurry—Grey Head has often the better of you! His fox is brushed, his pleasure is assured. Your game is ever slipping through your fingers; the fruit you grasp is often of the Dead Sea.

A last peep at foxhounds at work has been offered in the present week by the kindly thought of the Duke of Rutland, who fixed Wednesday last, April 5th, within riding distance of Melton. Easton Hall, the beautiful residence of Sir Hugh Cholmeley, was the trysting place, for the great good coverts in the neighbourhood—a chain of fine woodlands which merge into those of the Cottesmore, the whole forming a lengthy screen 'twixt the Shires of Leicester and Lincoln.

The meet was not till one o'clock; and even then, of course, was small. His Grace drove up with Mr. Little-Gilmour; but both wisely forbore to take the field against the cold drifting rain.

To be out with hounds once again, even to ride through coverts side by side with valued comrades—and this after the festivities and farewells of Croxton Park and Burrough Hill—was not ~~unlike~~ recalling a dream that has been partly broken, ~~may be~~ by the rude entrance of the villain with the shaving water. ~~With little more of it, it was pleasant to roam the woods,~~ while the Duke's grand pack drew from brake to brake to the huntsman's cheer. The primrose-carpeted glades, and the blackthorn blossoming in snowy white, lent an air of unreality

to the proceedings, which an unfortunate little incident served to intensify. A luckless vixen was suddenly chopped in Burton Long Wood; and Gillard's search soon brought to light eight tiny cubs from the brushwood hard by. The little black beasties—more like rough-coated moles than foxes—were still unable to see. Two were carried home by a member of the field, to be placed under the fostering care of his cat, and to be brought up as members of his flock; while the others were consigned to the keeper, to seek a nurse for them.



THE END.

